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The Guardian

Teach pupils for local jobs, Burnham to tell schools

Peter Walker
Josh Halliday

Andy Burnham will tell schools across England to adapt their curriculums to the needs of local businesses as part of a devolution drive aimed at tackling the jobs crisis for young people.

By moving decision-making to local areas, the PM hopes the plan will make technical and vocational skills as valued as academic qualifications – and help cut the benefits bill.

Based in part on the so-called Greater Manchester baccalaureate that Burnham introduced when he was mayor, it will task schools with making their curriculums for students aged 14 and above more responsive to the local jobs market, teaching technical skills alongside traditional academic subjects.

It would, the prime minister said, mean the country could “value the hard hat every bit as much as the graduation cap”.

Described by Downing Street as “a fundamental change to the education system”, the announcement kicks off a week of policy initiatives by Burnham, which is expected to also cover

the adult social care system, defence and devolution.

After last week's succession of rapid, consumer-focused policies such as help with electricity bills and a business rate cut for pubs, Burnham's team aim to use the coming days to present him as a leader willing to tackle more intractable and complex political problems.

Under the plan, intended to begin operating from September 2028, mayors and other local leaders would work with schools, colleges and employers to devise technical training built around local jobs.

In combination, there will be prioritised funding for such technical and vocational qualifications, plus guidance to Ofsted to recognise the value of these as well as more traditional qualifications.

In addition to giving local areas more control over education of people aged between 14 and 16, Burnham said the intention was to redress what he said was an over-simplified focus on academic routes.

He said: “For too long in this country, students have been told that you must take the academic path to do well and to be

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‘He was an utter joy’ Tributes as Goodies’ Bill Oddie dies at 85

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PHOTOGRAPH: SOPHIE LASLETT/THE TIMES

Fleeing the wildfires ‘It felt like a disaster movie’

Angelique Chrisafis
Bordeaux



Sitting in their apartment on the outskirts of Bordeaux, Krishma, an interpreter, and her husband, Nassir, first felt a sense of dread when a strange black cloud turned the sky dark in the middle of the day. Then a bitter burning smell filled the air outside.

“The sky changed colour. It seemed like a cloud but it was smoke covering the sun – it wasn’t a natural phenomenon. It didn’t

seem real,” said Nassir, an English literature graduate from Kabul who has been living in France for seven years. “We couldn’t breathe easily, you could feel it in your lungs.”

The acrid smell, which at first seemed like burning rubber then unmistakably like wood smoke, was blowing on the wind from the massive wildfire in Gironde in south-western France.

The blaze has torn through 42,000 hectares (103,000 acres) – an area four times the size of Paris – causing one of the biggest devastations of land in France

since the second world war. The government said yesterday that although the fire had stopped growing, it was still blazing and a new heatwave this week could make it harder to fight.

As the authorities carried out one of the biggest evacuations in modern French history, Krishma and Nassir were among 220,000 people ordered to flee their homes. Many people were evacuated from wooded areas directly hit by fire, where at least 240 homes were destroyed. But in an unprecedented move,

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Astronomer Brian Cox among critics as historic radio telescope faces axe as funding cut

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News

Alarm as control of NHS data moves to US private equity firm

Sarah Marsh

A US private equity firm will take control of NHS patient records in a deal experts say should “ring alarm bells” amid concerns that sensitive health data is increasingly being handed to private companies.

The investment firm TPG has bought Optum UK, the healthcare technology business behind the electronic patient record system used by most GP practices in England, in a deal worth about \$400m (£300m).

Doctors, campaigners, MPs and human rights groups say the transfer of a company handling millions of NHS patient records to a US private equity firm has taken place with little public scrutiny.

A spokesperson for the campaign group Doctors’ Association UK (DAUK) said: “Private equity now owns the plumbing of English general practice. The GP records of more than half the country sit on a system controlled by a firm whose business model is returns for investors, not care for patients, and the public found out after the fact.”

DAUK added: “We have been here before with Palantir. The difference

is that this time the buyer is a private equity giant whose overseas hospitals stand accused of pushing patients into debt ... We want the government to set out what safeguards exist, what happens to the data if TPG later sells the asset, and why none of this was put to parliament.”

Helen Morgan, the Liberal Democrats’ health spokesperson, said such deals were “being rubber-stamped without any scrutiny or protections for patients”, adding: “Time and time again, patients are seeing the government hand over sensitive NHS data to US tech firms, leaving our public services dangerously exposed.” She called for the government to listen and “start backing British tech instead”.

Concerns have also been raised about TPG’s record after African hospitals linked to the firm were accused of pushing patients into poverty via excessive medical bills.

This year, an investigation by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) examined hospitals in Kenya owned by Evercare, a healthcare group backed by TPG’s Rise Fund.

The investigation reported allegations that some patients were left with crippling debts and, in some

significant health and safety problem, with drivers left dehydrated after not drinking enough so as to avoid requiring a toilet break - putting passengers as well as staff at risk.

The union believed it had secured a breakthrough last summer when operators signed up to a charter set out by the rail safety board, after a long campaign to highlight the problems drivers faced.

Richard Hines, HM chief inspector of railways at the Office of Rail and Road (ORR), wrote to train operators on 29 July 2025, telling them “reliable welfare facilities [are] a basic requirement in any civilised society”.

He said the current situation, where some staff “lack adequate facilities or the time to use them”, was unacceptable. It was, he said, “a matter of human dignity, health, safety and respect to our people”.

Dave Calfe, the general secretary of Aslef, said: “We need action, not broken promises, to improve toilet facilities for drivers and to reduce the time drivers are expected to go without being able to take a toilet break. The health and wellbeing of our members is not a price we are prepared to pay for the inaction of the industry.”

The union said female drivers were

▼ Doctors and campaigners say the transfer of patient records has taken place with little public scrutiny

PHOTOGRAPH: SIMON TURNER/ALAMY



cases, were required to provide land deeds as collateral for unpaid medical bills. A spokesperson for TPG said it strongly disagreed “with the facts and characterisation of the allegations in the ICIJ’s report”.

They added: “We’ve made more than \$100m of investments across Evercare over six years, which have led to substantial gains in quality, accessibility, and accreditations, as well as patient rights and protections. Any suggestion that TPG or Evercare prioritises profits over patients is incorrect and ignores the extensive clinical governance and patient’s rights policies we’ve instituted.”

The former Oxfam health policy lead Anna Marriott said the deal should “ring major alarm bells”. She said: “It is deeply concerning that a private equity firm with a highly controversial track record in healthcare internationally can take control of sensitive NHS patient data with so little public scrutiny.”

“NHS patients have no say over who holds their medical records, which makes it the government’s job to guarantee their safety. This deal should ring major alarm bells.”

“Private equity’s penetration of our health service is fast outrunning the regulatory guardrails needed to

protect patients, workers and the public interest.”

TPG acquired Optum UK from the New York-listed healthcare corporation UnitedHealth Group. The business includes EMIS, whose software is used by more than half of GP practices in England, making it one of the NHS’s most significant providers of primary care technology and giving it responsibility for managing the electronic health records of millions of patients.

A spokesperson for EMIS said: “We have a longstanding commitment to the NHS and the wider UK healthcare system. Data security and patient privacy have always been at the core of our operations, supported by rigorous controls, strict access requirements, and compliance with all applicable regulatory and contractual obligations.”

“The acquisition was reviewed and approved by the UK government through the applicable channels in accordance with the National Security and Investment Act 2021.

“Any suggestion that this acquisition changes patient data protections disregards nearly three decades of upholding only the strictest compliance standards - a commitment TPG shares and has a demonstrated record of reinforcing through investment in the systems that further strengthen those safeguards.”

A spokesperson for TPG said: “Assertions that TPG could in any way access, control, maintain, or utilise NHS patient records are entirely false. A change in ownership of the company has in no way changed how patient data is stored, protected, or governed, nor has it altered the legal, regulatory, contractual, and operational safeguards that apply.

“TPG is committed to upholding and reinforcing EMIS’s independent standards of data protection, patient privacy, and service to the NHS.”

The Department of Health and Social Care did not provide a comment.

Calfe said: “Drivers are still paying with their health for industry inaction. The industry and the government cannot continue failing the workforce on the most basic level, and we need action now.”

Strike action on the railway has been relatively limited since pay deals in 2024 ended almost two years of intermittent nationwide action.

However, ballots are under way for drivers at LNER and Avanti, while RMT members at East Midlands Railway will strike on 1 August over issues with its new trains.

Wayne King, Unite’s national officer for passenger transport, said: “There are still nowhere near enough toilets available for bus drivers. It’s the employer’s responsibility and they’re failing miserably.”

He added: “This is a potential serious safety risk on multiple levels and can lead to the development of serious health conditions.”

A Department for Transport spokesperson said: “Train operators are legally required to provide suitable toilet facilities for their staff ... We strongly encourage industry to work together to ensure access to these facilities, and these kinds of welfare issues will be considered as we move towards Great British Railways.”

particularly affected and that the situation was a deterrent to the railway’s attempts to recruit more women.

The welfare charter, which should have been implemented within 12 months, requires “safe, clean, accessible and dignified” toilets across the railway, and a maximum time of four hours in the driving seat without the chance to go to the toilet.

In the ORR’s annual report, published this month, it says that despite the strong initial commitment and sign-up to the charter, “progress has been uneven and industry momentum has slowed”.

Conditions such as deep vein thrombosis, bladder issues, prostate cancer and colorectal cancer are believed to be linked to lack of toilet breaks.



▲ The lack of adequate facilities was unacceptable, operators were told

'Sam is home': Mayo banish 75-year-old 'curse' to become Gaelic football champions

Rory Carroll

Ireland correspondent

The hex is broken, banished, and a story that bewitched Ireland for decades has ended in fairytale: Mayo are all-Ireland champions.

Seventy-five years after a supposed curse condemned its Gaelic men's football team to endless defeat, the county prevailed and uncorked a wave of emotion that engulfed even its rivals.

The team were due to return to the west of Ireland for a euphoric homecoming yesterday evening after winning the senior football championship, a victory that thrilled Ireland and Mayo's diaspora, including Joe Biden, Mark Carney, and Noel and Liam Gallagher.

"Mayo 1-20, Kerry 1-17. Chisel it on the gravestones, scribble it in the sky," the Irish Times exulted. "Croke Park untethered, the whole place afloat for an hour on a lake of the sweetest tears that were ever cried."

Most pundits had favoured Kerry to win the 138th all-Ireland final and write another chapter of Mayo woe at Sunday's contest at the Dublin stadium. Instead the underdogs triumphed and even some Kerry fans wept at the catharsis.

Few seriously believed in the curse – it was said no member of the last winning team from 1951 would live to see another – but there was no doubting the drought that followed, with 11 defeats in 11 finals since 1989. A book about Mayo's quest was titled *House of Pain*.

Whenever the county made it to a final, a frisson gripped television viewers and the 82,000-strong stadium crowd: was this the day they would witness the end of the hex? On Sunday it was.

"To every young boy and girl across Mayo and our diaspora across the world, never stop dreaming, stick your chest out and be proud to be from Mayo," the team captain, Jack Coyne, declared as he held aloft the



▲ Mayo supporters with their team's registration plate signs outside Croke Park stadium in Dublin after the historic victory PHOTOGRAPH: BRIAN LAWLESS/PA



PHOTOGRAPHS: STEPHEN MCCARTHY AND DAIRE BRENNAN/GETTY

▲ Mayo and Kerry battle it out on Sunday; main image, the Sam Maguire cup flies into the air as players and their families celebrate after the game; right, Liam Gallagher



of Oasis with a 'Mayo for Sam' T-shirt during a visit to Ireland

homecoming committee chair, told RTÉ. "After what I saw in Croke Park yesterday, I think we'll have to revisit the plan."

Mayo, a landscape of bogs, rocks and Atlantic cliffs, is the third biggest of the island of Ireland's 32 counties. It is sparsely populated, with just 130,000 people, but players and supporters have a reputation for fervency in the Gaelic Athletic Association, the sport's governing body.

According to lore, the young victors of 1951 were on their way home to celebrate when they passed through the village of Foxford and failed to pay their respects to a funeral, prompting the enraged priest to utter the fateful words: "For as long as you all live, Mayo won't win another all-Ireland."

Seven decades later, the last surviving member of that team, Paddy Prendergast, told friends he would willingly "roll over and die" if there was any truth to the curse, but that it was a myth. "There was supposed to have been a funeral in the local church; I don't know whether there was or not. I saw people standing around the church but we didn't get off the truck because we couldn't get off the bloody truck," he said in 2017.

Researchers who investigated church records, press cuttings and other sources failed to find any evidence for the story of the supposed curse, which gained currency in the 1990s. The legend however is intact: Prendergast died in 2021, aged 95, two weeks after Mayo lost the final.

Joe Biden – who concluded a 2023 presidential visit to Mayo with a rallying cry, "Mayo for Sam!" – congratulated his ancestral home county. "Today, the dream becomes reality," he posted. "You earned this victory. Enjoy every minute."

The Canadian prime minister, Mark Carney, who made his own ancestral pilgrimage to Mayo last month, echoed the joy. "The curse is broken," he posted. The Gallagher brothers of Oasis, who also have family ties to Mayo, expressed pride. "Finally!! Up Mayo!!" Noel posted.

▲ Fans are jubilant after Mayo's 11-final losing streak is broken

trophy named after the legendary player Sam Maguire. "The wait is over. Sam is home."

Authorities had estimated a crowd of 40,000 would greet the team at McHale Park in the county capital of Castlebar yesterday but that looked conservative, Gerry Bourke, the

Von Hagens will be 'plastinated', says institute, after death at 81

Philip Oltermann

European culture editor

Gunther von Hagens, who developed a technique for permanently preserving human bodies in rigid states and toured the world with his controversial Body Worlds exhibition, has moved closer to fulfilling a long-held wish to be sliced up and displayed in a museum after dying aged 81.

"It is with deep sadness that the family and the Institute for

Plastination announce the passing of Dr Gunther von Hagens, inventor of plastination and creator of the Body Worlds exhibitions," the German anatomist's institute said in a statement yesterday.

Von Hagens, who was diagnosed with Parkinson's in 2008, died in hospital on 24 July, a day after suffering a cerebral haemorrhage.

He frequently said he wanted his own body to be preserved after his death, though he wavered on his preferred mode of presentation.

A spokesperson for the Plastinarium – a museum founded by von Hagens in Guben, Germany, in 2006 – said his body "will definitely be plastinated", as this was his "a long-held wish", though where it would be displayed had not been determined.

Von Hagens came up with his technique for preserving bodies in 1977, while working as a research scientist at the University of Heidelberg. "Looking at specimens embedded in plastic ... I wondered why the plastic was poured around bodies rather than into them," he wrote in the Guardian.

Plastination involves extracting bodily fluids and soluble fat from a dead body and replacing them with resins, silicon rubbers and epoxies.



▲ Gunther von Hagens developed his plastination technique in 1977

The technique lends a high degree of rigidity to the tissue, enabling bodies to be displayed in lifelike poses.

From 1995, von Hagens' plastinated bodies were displayed in travelling exhibitions. Some were sliced up to reveal internal organs, while others were posed playing chess, exercising or having sex. Body Worlds displays have attracted more than 50 million visitors.

"I wish I could suspend my convictions and embrace the idea of a divinity and an afterlife," he wrote in 2018. "But I don't think there is a continuum beyond death."

"Every deceased body I have seen has shown me the absence of the soul. I don't believe anything is left of us after we die."

'Frightening and dangerous'

How US airman avoided British justice after rape accusations

Rob Evans
Harry Davies
Emine Sinmaz

A US airman accused of a "spree" of rapes and sexual assaults in England, drugging some women and breaking into the homes of others, was able to avoid British justice after local police handed over part of the case to the American military.

Two British women went to Suffolk police in August 2019 to allege that James Loubeau and another US airman had drugged and raped them after they met in a nightclub in Bury St Edmunds. Less than two weeks later Suffolk police allowed the US air force to take responsibility for investigating the two alleged rapes.

It has since emerged that Loubeau, 38, allegedly attacked a total of six women in East Anglia over a four-month period in 2019, in what US prosecutors described as a "frightening and dangerous" pattern of assaults.

In July last year, a court in Miami, Florida, convicted Loubeau of sexually assaulting one of the women on a military base in England. He received a five-year prison sentence.

The fact that Loubeau was eventually brought to justice in a court more than 4,000 miles from his alleged crimes will add pressure on Suffolk police to explain the force's decision to cede jurisdiction in the case. It is declining to do so.

Three of Loubeau's alleged victims were female military personnel stationed alongside him at RAF Mildenhall. Under the terms of a 1951 agreement between the US and UK, the American military can claim responsibility for investigating alleged crimes when the victim is another member of the US armed forces. It also has jurisdiction over alleged crimes that occur when a member of their military is on duty.

In almost all other instances, the local British police forces have primary responsibility for investigating crimes on UK soil.

Three of Loubeau's alleged victims were British and accused him of attacking them while he was off-duty. They include the two women who first met him and his friend, another US airman, in a nightclub in Bury St Edmunds.

Court papers suggest the airman offered to drive the women home but instead drove to the Mildenhall base, where they went to Loubeau's bedroom. One of the women said they were given wine and Disaronno liqueur in plastic cups.



▲ The US military base at RAF Mildenhall, Suffolk, above and left, where James Loubeau was acquitted in a court martial in 2020

PHOTOGRAPH: CHRIS RADBURN/REUTERS

The next thing they remembered was waking about 6.30am, naked and confused. Neither woman knew how or why they had passed out, and both believed they had been raped, the documents said.

The women reported Loubeau and the second airman to Suffolk police on 3 August 2019, prompting the force to open an investigation. Just 11 days later, on 14 August, the force transferred responsibility for investigating the men to US military police. The military's investigation appears to have included as many as three other women who say they were attacked between April and July 2019.

The case culminated in a military trial, or court martial, for Loubeau, who held the rank of airman first class. It centred on allegations by one of his six alleged victims, an American servicewoman who said he had sexually assaulted her in June 2019 after breaking into her bedroom on the base. She alleged she had been woken up by Loubeau, who had sex with

her while she was "in and out of consciousness".

There is no public record of the court martial, but such tribunals often involve a jury panel of other American service personnel. It took place on the base in 2020 and resulted in Loubeau's acquittal.

While the tribunal did not find him guilty, Loubeau, an apprentice in the 100th Logistics Readiness vehicle maintenance squadron at Mildenhall, was dismissed in 2020 after three years' service.

He was discharged "under honourable conditions" for a series of "minor infractions". These included making sexual advances to women who were drunk, using derogatory language towards women, and stealing jewellery from a store at RAF Lakenheath, another US airbase. He returned to the US in 2021 and lived with relatives in Miami.

It was not until 2025, after an investigation by the FBI, that Loubeau was convicted over allegations from another of the six



◀ James Loubeau was convicted last year by a court in Miami, Florida, of sexual assault. He allegedly attacked six women in East Anglia in 2019

In documents submitted to the court prosecutors cited the allegations of other attacks in England to argue that Loubeau had preyed on sleeping or drunk women in a "disturbing, frightening and dangerous" pattern. The prosecutors said he had carried out an "assaultive spree" in Suffolk in 2019, adding that his "brazen conduct reflects his belief that he can act with impunity".

Among the cases referenced was that of the third British woman Loubeau was accused of attacking. The documents suggest she alleged Loubeau had assaulted her in her Cambridgeshire home in April 2019. She reported the alleged attack to Cambridgeshire police a year later, identifying Loubeau.

Cambridgeshire police said they had decided there was not enough evidence to bring a charge, and the victim had not supported a prosecution. While the force said it had not transferred responsibility for investigating the allegation to the US military police, a spokesperson added police had "worked with the United States air force as part of the investigation and assistance was provided".

The Guardian contacted the US air force military police with questions about the Loubeau case and why the US had claimed jurisdiction over alleged rapes for which an English force should have had primary responsibility.

The USAF police said that, as an investigative agency, it could not respond to questions about "decisions around jurisdiction, charges, and legal proceedings".

"Questions regarding these issues should be directed to the proper authorities. In this case, the Suffolk police should be better equipped" to respond, it said.

Suffolk police declined to answer detailed questions about the case or explain the decision to relinquish jurisdiction less than two weeks after the two British women said Loubeau had raped them. The force said: "We are in the process of reviewing the decision-making surrounding the transfer of primacy to the US air force and around case transfer practices more generally."

That review is understood to have been initiated as a result of the Guardian's investigation into crimes committed by US personnel on British soil. In recent weeks the Guardian has reported on the cases of Jacob Wulfson, a US fighter pilot who strangled a British woman in his apartment in Cambridge; Tyrion Davis, an American airman who allegedly raped a British woman in Brandon, Suffolk; and Hannes Marschalek, a US airman who allegedly exposed himself to a 16-year-old girl and four young women in Littleport, Cambridgeshire, in 2022.

In all the cases, US airmen avoided the British justice system after the local police force chose to cede control of the investigation to American military police.

Loubeau's lawyer, who represented him at the Miami hearing, declined to comment.

Additional reporting
Sophie Sullivan

'We are reviewing the decision-making surrounding case transfer practices'

Suffolk police

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◀ *The Lovell telescope at Jodrell Bank is prized by astronomers studying galaxies and black holes*

PHOTOGRAPH: LOOP IMAGES/UG/GETTY

Jodrell Bank Observatory facing closure after deep cuts in government funding

Ian Sample
 Science editor

Jodrell Bank Observatory, the hub of a world-leading network of radio telescopes, is facing closure after government funding for the facility was slashed.

The deep space observatory includes the Grade I-listed Lovell telescope and is prized by astronomers who study galaxies, black holes, star formations, planets beyond the solar system and the afterglow of the big bang.

The observatory's funder, UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), said yesterday that it would withdraw funding for the e-Merlin network, the UK's national radio astronomy facility at Jodrell Bank, when the current agreement ends in March 2028.

Scientists said the decision was a blow to UK astronomy, with observations at Jodrell Bank due to end completely unless other funding is found. "Jodrell has been delivering spectacular discovery science for decades," said Prof Catherine Heymans, Scotland's astronomer royal. "To see this world-leading facility cut is just devastating."

Further deep cuts were announced

Analysis Ian Sample

The best scientists will go wherever the best science can be done

On a chilly day in December 1945, Bernard Lovell, a physicist at the University of Manchester, struck out for the Cheshire countryside to study cosmic rays, the streams of high energy particles that criss-cross the universe. Peering at the signals from his army surplus radar, he made a discovery: radio reflections from the ionised trails of shooting stars.

The work marked the birth of radio astronomy at Jodrell Bank. A year later, engineers at the site mounted a radar on the base of a searchlight, providing sweeping access to speeding meteors. When Sputnik launched in 1957, they had just completed the Lovell telescope, the largest radio telescope in the world and the only one capable of tracking the Soviet satellite.

Jodrell Bank has remained world class, at the heart of a seven-telescope network called

e-Merlin, the UK's national radio astronomy capability. But now the network and Jodrell Bank itself are threatened with closure.

Radio astronomy is not an obscure endeavour producing esoteric data. It has changed our view of the universe. Armed with the technique, astronomers have spotted spinning neutron stars that emit powerful beams, illuminating space like a lighthouse. They have watched matter swirling around supermassive black holes, and glimpsed the faint afterglow of the big bang.

Astronomers, of course, have other telescopes to peer down, at least metaphorically. But UK researchers working on many of these face hefty cuts too. Last month, the Rubin Observatory in Chile embarked on a decade-long project to record the largest cosmic movie ever. The UK's involvement will drop 20%. The same goes for an observatory on La Palma in the Canary Islands. Work on the Bison solar observation network

will fall by 40%. And the country is withdrawing from the Event Horizon Telescope which captured the first image of a black hole. Astronomers converged on the same words to describe the news: devastating, shocking, disastrous.

The Science and Technology Facilities Council has said it needs to make £162m in savings by 2030. The crisis follows cost overruns that arose from soaring electricity and staff costs, and high foreign exchange rates for collaborations such as Cern, home to the Large Hadron Collider, near Geneva.

The STFC wants to prioritise specific areas of research. But the best scientists will go wherever the best science can be done. And on this the signs are ominous. A recent survey found that nearly 80% of early career physicists were considering leaving the UK following the funding crisis. The loss of even a fraction of that would be a blow for UK science and also national growth. The task now is to persuade them to stay.

for dozens of facilities, instruments and projects, which are expected to result in about 800 job losses. The TV scientist Brian Cox, a professor at the University of Manchester, said he was stunned that the funder had pressed ahead with cuts and not worked with the new government to avoid them.

"These devastating and irreversible cuts are a legacy from a series of hasty and ill-considered decisions taken by UKRI, overseen by a government department that no longer exists," Cox said. "I am astonished that UKRI are still ploughing ahead, and not working with the Burnham government to find a solution."

The UKRI has an annual budget of nearly £10bn, but the Science and Technology Facilities Council (STFC), which it funds, needs to make substantial savings after cost overruns due to soaring electricity and staff costs at UK facilities and high foreign exchange rates for international collaborations, such as the Cern nuclear research laboratory near Geneva.

Prof Simon Garrington, an associate director of the Jodrell Bank Observatory, said staff were shocked by the decision. "Withdrawing the funding from e-Merlin effectively pulls the rug from under Jodrell Bank," he said.

The move threatens 28 jobs at the observatory and will affect nearly 3,000 researchers who work with the facility. Garrington intends to challenge the decision but hopes that new uses for the telescope might draw in some alternative funding.

Jodrell Bank was among dozens of facilities, instruments and projects hit by the cuts yesterday. There will, for instance, be a 20% cut to UK participation in the Rubin Observatory in Chile, while the Next Generation Transit Survey, which is searching for solar systems like ours, received a 45% cut.

The president of the Royal Astronomical Society, Prof Jim Wild, said: "Discarding unique, globally significant observatories threatens both our scientific future and the inspiration of future generations of astronomers."

Funding for future instruments on the Extremely Large Telescope, which is searching for life elsewhere, has been completely cut.

The UK will also withdraw from the Event Horizon Telescope, which allowed astronomers to image the black hole at the heart of the Milky Way. The cuts are expected to lead to about 800 job losses.

An STFC spokesperson said the body had "undertaken a rigorous prioritisation process to focus investment on the areas that will deliver the greatest long-term scientific capability, impact and value for the UK".

They added: "The decision to withdraw funding from e-Merlin at the end of its current funding agreement is the result of a comprehensive, evidence-based prioritisation process."



Burnham urges schools to adapt curriculum to local jobs crisis

Continued from page 1

respected. The whole school system has been built around it and that has let down young people seeking technical qualifications.

"I want an education system based on parity between academic and technical which gives all young people a clear path in life. From today, Britain will value the hard hat every bit as much as the graduation cap."

The intention is also to help address the worsening problem of young people not in education, employment or training, the so-called Neets, which was the subject of a report published in May by the former Labour minister Alan Milburn.

The first part of an ongoing review, Milburn's report said the issue now affected 1 million young people across the UK, with the numbers rising fast. It cited a number of factors, including a changing job market, inequality and health problems, but also blamed a lack of focus on employability skills and non-academic qualifications.

He has previously said that while schools are "brilliant" at sorting young people by academic ability, "time and again employers say young people are not work ready".

Milburn said in a statement last

Labour tops voter poll

Labour has knocked Reform off the top of a poll for the first time in more than a year as Andy Burnham benefits from the momentum built in his first week as prime minister.

The weekly tracker of voting intention by More in Common also comes after weeks of negative headlines for Reform UK and its leader, Nigel Farage.

The poll shows Labour up four points at 28%, while Reform UK and the Greens have dropped two and three points respectively to 24% and 8%. The Tories remain unchanged at 22%.

Luke Tryl, of More in Common, said: "It's clear that momentum is on the prime minister's side ... Labour now leads for the first time since March of last year, and holds their highest vote share since the early months of this government in 2024."

He added: "It seems that this early focus on the cost of living has appealed to voters that Labour has lost across left and right." **Jamie Grierson**

night that he welcomed the plans to overhaul and devolve education for 14-plus pupils, calling it "a big step in the right direction and consistent with the findings of my review".

Moves to get more young people into work will also be a key element of wider efforts to tackle the benefits system, due to be guided by both Milburn's findings and a separate review by Stephen Timms, the minister for social security, into the personal independence payment disability system.

In an interview with the BBC broadcast last night, Burnham said he believed that many young people had been failed by a system that "pays for failure" rather than "sets people up for success". Asked if he believed some people received benefits they did not need, he replied: "I wouldn't necessarily go straight to blaming those people."

"What I would say is that there are people in the benefit system, young people in their 20s, who have been, I would say, quite seriously let down because the support wasn't there for them when it should have been."

This failure included, he said, "an education system that for a very long time has been obsessed on the university route but hasn't done enough for young people who want technical qualifications and in many ways has treated them as second class students".

The new initiative is firmly based on Burnham's flagship education policy as Greater Manchester mayor, introduced in September 2024.

Known as the Greater Manchester baccalaureate, or MBacc, it was designed to offer courses and work experience for children aged 14 and over in key sectors in the regional economy. Alongside the traditional subjects of English, maths and sciences, schools in Greater Manchester can now offer technical lessons tailored towards employment in industries including financial

Labour Phillipson appointed as party chair

Alexandra Topping
Political correspondent

Bridget Phillipson has been appointed Labour party chair, putting her at the vanguard of Labour's battle to win the next general election.

The former education secretary and architect of a landmark overhaul in special educational needs and disabilities (Send) provision in England will follow in the footsteps of other Labour big beasts who have held the position, including Harriet Harman, Angela Rayner and Tom Watson.

Phillipson, who was sacked as education secretary by Andy Burnham last week, replaces Anna Turley after last week's government reshuffle, which saw the Labour Co-op MP for Redcar moved to a new ministerial role in the Home Office.

The prime minister said the MP for Houghton and Sunderland South

would drive culture change and work alongside him and Lucy Powell. "She will play a vital role in ensuring the Labour party is match fit for the next election," he said. "I am delighted Bridget has accepted this role and I look forward to working closely with her on this vital task."

After a major cabinet reshuffle in which dozens of cabinet ministers, including several loyal to Keir Starmer, were removed from their posts, Phillipson was viewed as a rare survivor, albeit in a reduced role.

In what is likely to be seen as an olive branch to members of the previous government, Labour said the appointment reflected Burnham's "commitment to drawing on the full breadth and depth of talent across the Labour party as he builds one united team".

Phillipson said she would put



▲ Bridget Phillipson was one of the few survivors of the Starmer cabinet

"Labour values and the voices of our movement at the heart of government". She added: "By uniting together, we will bring hope back to communities and strengthen British society against those working to divide us."

Phillipson was demoted last week when she was replaced by key Burnham ally Powell as secretary of state for education. But she maintained her position in the cabinet as women and equalities minister, the first time the traditionally more minor role has been part of cabinet in its own right.

While not an overt Burnhamite, the former education secretary was not seen as overly tribal and had won plaudits from Labour MPs for her engagement over plans to make provision for children with Send more widely available in mainstream schools. Critics raised concerns about the plans, which will raise the bar at which children in England qualify for an education, health and care plan (EHCP), which legally entitles them to get support.

Phillipson has become something of a bete noire for some on the right after overseeing the Labour policy of applying 20% VAT to private school fees from the start of 2025, having recently been called a "spiteful class warrior" by Conservative party leader Kemi Badenoch.



Analysis
Pippa Crerar



New PM has a chance to focus on domestic matters for now, but troubles abroad continue

As he welcomed Volodymyr Zelenskyy to the naval base in Portsmouth yesterday, Andy Burnham told the Ukrainian president it was "no accident" the he was his first international visitor since entering Downing Street.

"It is intended to send a very clear message," the prime minister told him. "We are with Ukraine 100%, I am personally with you 100%, and I will honour every commitment this country has made to Ukraine in full."

In short, the UK's support for Kyiv would continue despite the

change in leadership. For Keir Starmer, the relationship with Zelenskyy became one of the defining ones of his premiership. In a symbolic move, Starmer travelled to Ukraine during his final week in office, receiving the order of freedom medal for his role leading the coalition of the willing and helping to persuade the US president Donald Trump back to the table on Ukraine, after he flirted with siding with Vladimir Putin.

But over the course of his premiership, the former Labour leader faced accusations of spending too much time on international issues instead of domestic ones, with his critics



nicknaming him “never here Keir” and even his own Downing Street team complaining that he “needs to get off a plane”.

Burnham, in contrast, has always been clear he would prioritise what was happening at home, reflecting his own political instincts as well as his wariness of not falling into the same trap as his predecessor.

But it led some in the party to worry that he would be unprepared for the global stage.

“It’s a frustrating characterisation because not many incoming prime ministers, including Keir, have any experience of international affairs,” one of his inner circle said.

“Andy has said that his priority will be domestic, but of course there will be moments where he’ll need to be more outward facing.”

Day to day, Burnham’s allies suggested that he will rely on delegating responsibility to his team - including his foreign secretary in Ed Miliband and senior diplomatic adviser in Jonathan Powell, whom he persuaded to stay on in No 10.

Labour MPs point out that Yvette Cooper, Miliband’s predecessor, was often left fighting for influence with figures who saw themselves as the de facto foreign secretary,

▲ *Andy Burnham welcomes president Zelenskyy to the naval base in Portsmouth, Hampshire*
PHOTOGRAPH: SIMON JONES/AP

including the deputy prime minister, David Lammy, Powell, and Starmer himself.

One senior MP said: “I suspect that Ed may be in a fortunate position where he is actually given more freedom than other foreign secretaries in the past. As long as Ed is known to have the authority of the PM and to be trusted to speak for him, then this may be his moment.”

Other Labour figures suggested that strong prime ministers should be able to delegate and rely on their teams. One said: “I don’t think Andy is particularly interested in foreign affairs. He’ll need to front some things up, but as long as he’s well briefed and charming, he doesn’t need to make the day-to-day decisions like Keir did.”

But they warned there would inevitably be moments where complex international issues “crash land” on UK domestic policy - as Starmer found to his cost when dealing with Trump - and he would have no choice but to intervene.

Burnham has already indicated that he will not shy away from

standing up to the US president. “Obviously, the relationship is important to the UK, but not to the point where we just go along with anything that they say,” he told the Guardian last month.

There are some with experience of foreign affairs in government who believe that Starmer has already done the hard yards - on Ukraine, the EU and the US in particular - so Burnham just has to stick to the same course.

In his final interview in office, Starmer told his successor that he should not spend less time focusing on international affairs, in order to prioritise the situation at home. “It’s not sensible to think you can just separate these two things out,” he said.

But those around Burnham believe he can better balance them. At least for now. They have been watching events in Iran closely, mindful of the potential to cause yet more global economic upheaval should Trump take further action.

“Andy has a bit of space now to prioritise policy at home - but it could all be blown off course by Iran,” one Foreign Office insider warned. “He has to seize this moment to talk about the domestic, because this window might not come again.”

Social care

PM pledges cross-party efforts to find lasting solution

Jessica Elgot

Deputy political editor

Andy Burnham has pledged to work collaboratively with other parties to find a lasting solution on social care, though the Conservatives ruled out backing changes funded by tax rises or borrowing.

Senior Labour and Liberal Democrat figures have privately cast doubt on Burnham’s ability to find a cross-party consensus on social care reform in England, given the terms of the Tories’ participation.

Speaking before a major social care speech tomorrow, Burnham said he would lead cross-party talks on fixing the broken system.

The prime minister said: “I want to build a different way of doing politics with more problem solving, less point scoring, and credit to the leaders of the two main [opposition] parties, Kemi Badenoch and Ed Davey, both of whom have reached out over the weekend to say they’re prepared to engage in talks.

“On this issue no party is in a position where they’ve got the high ground. We’ve all failed on this issue, over decades, and the pressure now on the National Health Service as a result of that failure is huge.”

Burnham has previously promised to use “whatever political capital I have” to fix the social care system in England, saying there were “major changes you can make before the next election”.

He is understood to be committed to exploring a new system that would be free at the point of use, saying he would like one that “operates on the NHS principle”.

Other options, such as a care costs cap, are understood to be less attractive to Burnham, though would cost the taxpayer significantly less than a national care service.

A middle-ground option would be one similar to Scotland, where personal care costs are paid by the state but other costs, such as accommodation and food in care homes, are borne by the individual and their family.

Burnham said yesterday that he

would try to start with short-term agreements between parties and then build towards a longer-term solution.

“I would like to see if we could arrange talks, cross-party talks, to build that spirit of collaboration from the start. This solution, this issue requires a solution that is lasting, cross-party, and is one that the country can support. So the more we go forward on that basis, the better,” he said.

Labour MPs have broadly welcomed the prospect of reform, though several in the party cautioned that there would need to be serious consideration on how to protect people from losing their homes to care costs, or to avoid penalising those with new taxes who had already saved for retirement and care.

Though he said he would not put a specific timeframe on the changes, Burnham said he wanted to move quickly. “I would not want to leave office without having brought in the substantial change, the new system of social care,” he told the BBC.

Davey has said he was also prepared to make tough decisions to support the right reforms on social care. The leaders have agreed in principle to meet and discuss how to find consensus.

A Lib Dem source said they had been taken aback by the unwillingness of Keir Starmer’s government to work with Davey on social care - particularly given both Starmer and Davey’s families’ experiences of the care system.

“Unless you manage to at least make an attempt at consensus, having a big majority means nothing,” one said. “Because what happens is you ram it through parliament. And then the opposition parties just tear it to bits, and that’s what’s happened time and time again.”

The party will make the inclusion of family carers in the reforms a condition of Liberal Democrat support for any resulting tax changes.

Key will be speeding up Louise Casey’s review into social care which had been expected to report by 2028 - but which the health and social care committee has said should be accelerated to report by the end of the year. Only those with less than £23,250 in assets currently qualify for free social care.

Senior Labour and Liberal Democrats said the Conservatives’ stipulations on the reforms suggested they were not open to cross-party working. One Labour source said: “This has been a Conservative attack line for decades and they will not be able to resist opposing it - hope they will prove us wrong but I doubt it.”

In a letter to Burnham setting out the terms for supporting any reform, the Conservative leader, Kemi Badenoch, said it had “not been at all simple” to find a consensus on reform. She said the Conservatives would only support reforms that were funded by spending cuts. “You must rule out any tax rises, or increased borrowing that will ultimately fall on the next generation to pay for,” she said.

▼ ‘Reverse comfort eating’ has seen Waitrose’s sales of cottage pies more than double in the last month

PHOTOGRAPH: BORIS SUNSTOV/GETTY IMAGES



Some still like it hot: heatwaves see surprise spike in comfort food sales

Caroline Davies

Forget reaching for a crisp salad and glass of chilled rosé. Enervated Brits are seemingly more likely to crave a rich cottage pie and robust red to combat the current heatwave.

In a trend termed “reverse comfort eating”, Waitrose has seen cottage pie sales soar 110% in the last month and South African red up 68%, compared with the same period last year.

The surprise rise in sales of winter comfort foods also included bacon and leek pie (up 41%), chicken korma (67%) and chicken and ham gratin (68%).



100%
Year-on-year increase in sales by Waitrose of its strawberry trifle – a 1950s comfort food classic

Meanwhile, home cooks are happy standing over the stove despite the sweltering heat, with searches for traditional food classics on the supermarket chain’s recipe site seeing toad-in-the-hole up 67%, spaghetti bolognese up 91% and rarebit mac’n’cheese up 57%. Trifle is also high on shopping lists – with the supermarket seeing a 100% year on-year increase in sales of its strawberry variant.

The food historian and author Seren Charrington-Hollis recently catered for a VIP event at the Llangollen Eisteddfod festival, where her cottage pies and lamb hotpots were in huge demand, to her surprise, “as it was unbearably hot”.

If it all seems a bit “school dinners”, “I think it’s very much a psychological switch, of people wanting to really indulge in home-cooked food and traditional food,” added Charrington-Hollis, whose forthcoming book is on nostalgic food from childhood.

“I mean not just politically, economically, but also the weather is not quite right. I think we’re completely out of sync. We’re not used to all this warm weather.

“And what better way to connect with ourselves and almost get back to our roots than through food?”

The chef Simon Wood believes the cost of living crisis is a factor. Such dishes have long been pub classics but with cutbacks on eating out, “I think they’re trying to get that hint of going out to the pubs but maybe doing it at home,” said the 2015 MasterChef winner.

As for choosing hot and hearty ready meals in the heat, Wood said time constraints and lack of skill-set in the kitchen were drivers. Also, people are just “sick of salad”.

Stephen Parkins-Knight, a senior innovation chef at Waitrose, has his own theories about the nostalgic cravings.

“Forget the thermostat; when a heatwave goes on, raw salads and chilled plates can often lose their cool fast. What we’re seeing is a trend in ‘reverse comfort eating’ – after spending all day drained by the heat, people crave rich, grounding staples to recharge, pivoting back toward comfort and familiarity.”



▲ Zippy and Ronnie Le Drew appear on *The Big Breakfast* in 2022

Ronnie Le Drew, puppeteer behind Zippy, dies aged 78

Martin Belam

Ronnie Le Drew, best known for operating the puppet Zippy on the children’s television programme *Rainbow*, has died aged 78.

The Canadian-born British puppeteer was also known for working on 1986’s *Labyrinth* alongside David Bowie, as well as *Little Shop of Horrors* the same year, and various Muppet movies including *The Muppet Christmas Carol* in 1992.

In a statement announcing his death, the British Puppet Guild said: “We are saddened to announce the death of our president and friend Ronnie Le Drew, following a short illness. Ronnie has been our president for 10 years, possibly the most active and supportive president we have ever had or will have.”

The puppet duo of Zippy and George were initially voiced by Roy Skelton, who also voiced Doctor Who’s Daleks between 1967 and 1988. He died in 2011, aged 79, having contributed to the enduring popularity of the brash, mouthy know-it-all Zippy, and the rather more shy and retiring pink hippopotamus George.

Rainbow launched in 1972 and was made by Thames Television continuously until 1992.



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'We're not giving up' Officers still hope to bring closure to Suzy Lamplugh's family

Amelia Gentleman

Det Ch Insp Teresa Foster, who leads the Metropolitan police's cold case homicide team, first heard about the disappearance of the London estate agent Suzy Lamplugh when she was 12 years old watching the TV news at home in the small New Zealand town where she grew up.

"It was a huge story," she said, recalling how the unsolved case attracted global attention in 1986. "It was shocking." Foster later emigrated to the UK and four decades on is making a final appeal for information that could lead to the discovery of Lamplugh's body and bring closure for her family.

Foster's 15-strong team remain hopeful that people who knew her killer could still contact police with new information. Met police detectives have this year solved two other similarly historical cold cases, a murder and a manslaughter, after family members of those involved came forward having decided to abandon loyalties to their relatives in later life.

"We're not going to give up on trying to find where Suzy is," DCI Foster said, ahead of the 40th anniversary of her disappearance. "It's going to take a change in forensics or technology, or a change of allegiance, or someone coming forward."

The search for Lamplugh was one of the largest missing persons investigations ever mounted in the UK. The 25-year-old left her south London office at around 12.40 on Monday 28 July 1986 and was never seen again. Colleagues believed that she intended to take a client on a viewing because she took the keys for a nearby flat; a note in her diary said that she had a 12.45 meeting with a Mr Kipper at 37 Shorrols Road.

Despite the significant passage of time since these events, Lamplugh's case continues to trouble Met police officers.



◀ *Suzy Lamplugh, second left, with her siblings, left to right, Richard, Tamsin and Lizzie; below left, the Met police's carousel of filing cards, containing 26,000 tipoffs and persons of interest; below, a poster appealing for witnesses to come forward for one of the biggest missing persons cases in British history*

PHOTOGRAPHS: PA; SHEARWATER MEDIA/SHUTTERSTOCK



"We're very close to the family, so it does haunt us that we can't give them answers," Foster said, adding that the Putney police station where her team is based is just a short drive away both from Lamplugh's former home and the streets where she worked and where her car was later found abandoned. The team's priority is "finding her resting place and bringing her back".

Lamplugh was legally declared dead, presumed abducted and murdered, in 1993. The case is one of the Met police's oldest open

murder investigations. Police failed to gather enough evidence to charge their prime suspect, John Cannan, who was arrested in 2000. A forensic review of all the significant material available was completed in 2024, but failed to unearth any DNA or fingerprints that might have helped detectives resolve who killed Lamplugh.

Police are storing 178 boxes of notes and evidence relating to her case, 3,000 files have been uploaded to the police Holmes (Home Office large major enquiry system) documents, and a carousel



filing system, where tipoffs received from the public were recorded in the 1980s, contains 26,000 entries.

Foster showed a block of cards relating to their prime suspect, Cannan. "It might not look much, but everybody else here just has one card; John Cannan has quite a lot of cards all attached together," Foster said. After Cannan died in Full Sutton prison in November 2024, aged 70, her colleagues went to his cell to search his possessions but found nothing to further their investigations.

They plan to follow up a further 30 potential witness leads over the next 12 months, but if no useful information is discovered the case will finally be classified as inactive, which means that officers will continue to respond to new leads if they emerge but will no longer be regularly working on the case.

They hope that forensic advances in the future might enable detectives to reanalyse materials gathered from the Ford Fiesta that Lamplugh was driving on the day she disappeared - a rearview mirror, seat tape from the seats. There are two smudged fingerprints detected on the rearview mirror which have yet to be matched with any suspect's DNA profile. "They could come up as a match at some stage through our European database," Foster said.

She is still hoping that someone who knew Cannan might decide belatedly to speak to officers. "Often we find it is a family member that will come forward in these cold cases," she said.

Earlier this month Michael Stewart and his brother Anthony Stewart were found guilty of murdering civil servant Anthony Littler in 1984, after their younger brother Daniel tipped off the police.

Foster promised protection to new informants, adding: "If anybody has that information, we'll take it forward, but we'll also safeguard them in any way we can."

Police believe that they would be much better equipped to handle a case like Lamplugh's were it to happen now, because of GPS data and CCTV footage, and would no longer have to rely on index card records of tipoffs and suspects.

Both of Lamplugh's parents are now dead, but her siblings recently gathered to celebrate her life. "She was, as she is always portrayed, a truly beautiful person inside and out. Everyone who met Suz was touched by her kindness, empathy, strength of character and joy for life," they said. Her parents established the Suzy Lamplugh Trust, which tackles stalking.

Foster believes that Lamplugh was targeted by a stalker, "a predator of some type who then lured her into a false meeting". Her diaries remain with the police. In one entry she recorded her joy at getting a job with the estate agency: "The company puts me in the window desk, as the most attractive female. That's how it is, the most attractive female on display for any man to see."

Singer Carly Simon reveals she is 'learning to live with Parkinson's'

Owen Myers

The musician Carly Simon has revealed that she has Parkinson's disease.

"So many people have written to me, kindly wondering about my relative silence, asking how I am and what I have been doing," Simon said in a statement released yesterday.



▲ *The 83-year-old singer-songwriter will release a new record next month*

"The truth is, I've been learning how to live with Parkinson's disease."

Simon's musical career has endured for many decades since she won the Grammy award for best new artist in 1972, with beloved hits including You're So Vain, Let the River Run and Nobody Does It Better.

"It has taken me some time to understand the diagnosis, to adjust to it and to decide how much I wanted to say about it," said Simon, who turned 83 last month. She said she was still in the process of accepting the condition "without feeling that I have surrendered something essential".

"Parkinson's is different for everyone, and it can be unpredictable," she

said. "Some days I'm so tired I can't get the day moving at all. On others, it gives me a little more room to move, think, work, and feel like myself."

Parkinson's disease affects more than 10 million people worldwide, with 90,000 people diagnosed every year in the US alone, according to the Parkinson's Foundation.

Common symptoms include tremors, stiffness, slowed movement and balance issues, as well as depression, anxiety and feelings of apathy. There is no cure, but treatment can help manage symptoms and restore quality of life.

"There is no tidy or predictable schedule to the illness," Simon said.

"It does not consult my calendar before deciding what kind of day I am going to have."

The singer said her health issues began after she had a knee and hip replacement due to arthritis. She received her diagnosis at the Mayo Clinic, a private US healthcare facility.

Simon added that the recording process for her new album, Comes in Waves, had given shape to her days. The record is scheduled for release on 14 August.

"It gave me somewhere to go without having to leave the room," she said. "It reminded me that illness can change your life without becoming the whole of your life."



◀ Matt Damon is Odysseus in *The Odyssey*, which Christopher Nolan wrote based on Emily Wilson's version of Homer's work

PHOTOGRAPH:
MELINDA SUE
GORDON/UNIVERSAL
STUDIOS

Odyssey translator dismisses Nolan movie as 'abysmal'

Andrew Pulver

Emily Wilson, the classicist whose 2017 translation of Homer's *Odyssey* was cited by Christopher Nolan in early publicity for his hugely successful adaptation of the poem, has roundly criticised the film, saying "it has nothing convincing to say" and that it "lacks psychological, emotional, political and ethical depth".

In a scathing essay for the *London Review of Books*, Wilson writes: "I had hoped that Nolan's affinity with these Homeric themes might push him to new creative heights, and enable him to conjure more believable characters."

"But *The Odyssey* features his usual combination of grandiosity and superficiality ... the film's vision

is too confused, its characters too underdeveloped, to deliver what it half-promises in terms of big ideas - although it is very good at conveying big bangs and big giants."

Wilson adds: "Nolan's *Odyssey* lacks many of the elements that make the poem great. It has nothing convincing to say about time, memory, history, war, or about the relationship between one warrior's glorious return and the lives of his family, adversaries, comrades, friends and neighbours."

"It lacks psychological, emotional, political and ethical depth. Its narrative structure is gimmicky. The writing is abysmal. None of the characters has convincing motivation for their actions or words. There are no sex scenes, and all the food looks horrible."

Wilson also noted Nolan's

admiration for the opening line of her *Odyssey* translation - "Tell me about a complicated man" - but added: "I would be ashamed to have written any part of this script."

Wilson, professor of classical studies at the University of Pennsylvania, also went on the attack in an interview with the *Sunday Times*, saying: "It didn't land emotionally for me at all. Which I think is partly about the fact that, unlike Homer, it's not very well written."

"The characters don't have the kind of depth the Homeric characters have. I felt, 'Do I really care if this guy gets back to his wife?' You haven't given me any reason to."

Nevertheless, Wilson acknowledged the impact the film is already having on ancient Greek literature. "Translations of *Odyssey*, including mine, are flying off the shelves."

Pirated version pulled

A leaked copy of *The Odyssey* has been taken down from Elon Musk's X platform but only after a post flagging it gained millions of views.

A high-quality pirated version of the film went viral at the weekend after an account linked to it, saying: "Someone uploaded 'The Odyssey' full movie on X. Can you believe it?" The post was viewed more than 3m times before the account was suspended by X.

Christopher Nolan's film has been a hit since its release at the beginning of July, securing glowing reviews and more than \$600m (£450m) at the global box office. It is not known how the bootleg version was obtained.

The leak does not appear to have dented box office performance. The film's global takings have risen to \$640m after it took \$87m in the US on its second weekend of release, a decline of 30% on its opening weekend but still a sign of its holding power.

In a statement, Universal said: "We became aware of the unauthorised posting of the film and immediately initiated takedown protocols. We take copyright infringement seriously and will pursue all appropriate remedies to protect our content and intellectual property rights."

Musk, the owner of X, has been a vocal critic of *The Odyssey*, using its casting choices - such as the Black actor Lupita Nyong'o as Helen of Troy - as vehicles for arguments about diversity equality and inclusion culture. Last week he said he would use his AI platform Grok Imagine to make a "historically accurate" adaptation of Homer's epic poem.

The criticism "comes with the territory", Nolan has said. "These conversations that happen before people see the film - they're always irrelevant, because no one having them knows what the film actually is yet." X was contacted for comment. **Dan Milmo**



Emily Wilson says the film lacks depth

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Funeral director broke trust on 'almost industrial scale', court hears

Priya Bharadia

A fraudulent funeral director broke the trust of families on an “almost industrial scale” as their loved ones’ bodies were left “rotting away”, a court has heard.

Robert Bush, the owner of Legacy Independent Funeral Directors in Hull, appeared at Hull crown court yesterday for a five-day sentencing hearing. He previously pleaded guilty to 67 offences, including 30 counts of preventing lawful and decent burial.

Several family members read out their victim impact statements to the court, recounting nightmares and PTSD from Bush’s offending, with some breaking down in tears and struggling to speak.

Bush, 48, from Otley, West Yorkshire, told reporters on his way into court that he apologised to the families affected. While listening to the victims’ statements from the dock, he looked down at his lap frequently but showed little visible emotion.

Several family members recalled Bush “smiling” as he handed them the wrong ashes, while their loved ones remained secretly uncremated.

When Jayne Rimmington came to collect the ashes of her 86-year-old mother, Shirley Wright, in October 2023, she was surprised by how heavy they were. Bush claimed this was due to her “bone density”.

The body of Wright was recovered



▲ Robert Bush arrives at Hull crown court for sentencing yesterday

on the Legacy premises five months after her death. “I trusted him,” said Rimmington. “He stood there smiling, handed me the box, when she was still laying there, rotting away. It’s a purely evil thing to do.”

Vicky Mitchell received her father Colin Wainman’s ashes in a blue box inside a Hobbycraft bag. The 69-year-old’s body was recovered on 8 March 2024, 198 days after his death.

“My opinion is he is a charlatan,” she told the court. “A gravedigger from the 1800s. He didn’t care.”

Prosecutor Chris Paxton KC said Bush was “entrusted by hundreds of bereaved families in their time of need” but he “breached that trust on an almost industrial scale”.

In a search of the Legacy premises in March 2024, Humberside police found many bodies left uncovered and in varying states of decomposition, stored on racks on both sides of the room. One naked body still lay on a stretcher on the floor. Flowers, rings, teddy bears and cards with messages for loved ones had been swept under the floor.

The removal of bodies took two days and several officers, including a disaster identification team. Bodies had to be identified by dental records, DNA examination or fingerprints.

Police also uncovered the remains of an 18-week stillborn boy, identified as Sunny Beverley-Conlin, on the floor of the premises, inside what appeared to be a police evidence bag. His mother, Jasmine Beverley, believed he had been given a funeral and cremated.

David Gorbett, who had been given the wrong ashes for his wife, Susan, said in his statement that he felt guilty for being “unable to fulfil my wife’s last request - that I deal with her death quickly”.

He called for stronger regulation of the funeral industry. “It is hard to believe a person needs more permits to sell burgers than to deal with the dead,” he said.

only making plans for Nigel”, alongside a photograph of a guillotine.

A Green party spokesperson said that Polanski “condemns the image on the T-shirt” and accepted being tagged in a post with 20 images “without realising there was more to it than he had seen”.

Nigel Farage shared a screenshot of the image on X and wrote: “This is what Zack Polanski has just



◀ Harley Weir’s photograph of Charli xcx is exhibited in the National Portrait Gallery’s History Makers Now space

PHOTOGRAPH: HARLEY WEIR/PA

Portrait of the artist as a Brat: Charli xcx joins gallery’s stars

Ben Beaumont-Thomas

A portrait of Charli xcx has been added to the National Portrait Gallery’s collection, in the week that she hopes for a No 1 chart position for her new album *Music, Fashion, Film*.

The photograph by Harley Weir was taken in 2023 and became one of the key images associated with Charli’s Brat era: the 2024 album that became a pop cultural phenomenon.

Brandei Estes of the National Portrait Gallery said it was “delighted”

with the acquisition. Charli was “one of the defining cultural figures of her generation” and Weir’s “distinctive photographic language ... combines intimacy with a powerful sense of presence”, Estes said.

The photo is exhibited in the gallery’s History Makers Now space, and its acquisition was funded by a gift from the Bukhman Foundation.

Music, Fashion, Film has been a critical and commercial success since its release on Friday, with the Guardian describing her as “our most consistently bracing pop star” in a five-star review.

It could become Charli’s fourth UK No 1 and second this year, after her soundtrack to *Wuthering Heights* topped the chart in February. It is at No 1 in the midweek chart.

Over the weekend she released three additional songs, described as B-sides, and titled *I Keep on Thinking Bout You Every Single Day and Night*, *Playboy Bunny* and *If You Take Away the Music Then What Has She Got?*

“I felt adamant I wouldn’t put them on streaming because it sort of felt counterintuitive to the whole ethos of those songs, but I know you all really wanted them so I’ve begrudgingly put them on iTunes lol,” she said on Instagram.

Her next major live shows are headlining the Reading and Leeds festival, before a North American tour in September and October.

Polanski post reported to police by Reform for ‘inciting murder’

Sinéad Campbell

Police are “conducting inquiries” into an image shared by Green party leader Zack Polanski on Instagram after Reform UK reported it for “inciting murder”.

The image showed a man wearing a black T-shirt with the words “we’re

posted on his Instagram. If I was to post anything as inciteful then I would expect to be arrested, and so should Polanski.”

Reform UK’s spokesperson for home affairs, Zia Yusuf, said Polanski was “inciting murder”, and that sharing the image weeks after the death of former Conservative MP and Reform member Ann Widdecombe, who was murdered in her home in Devon, was “staggering”.

Last week, prosecutors told a court that a man allegedly hit Widdecombe 21 times over the head with a hammer in a “planned and targeted” attack.

A Green party spokesperson said:

“The T-shirt is clearly in poor taste, especially at a time of heightened fears for the security of public figures ... He [Polanski] and the Green party call on everyone involved in public discourse to show kindness and not encourage more division.”

A spokesperson for the Metropolitan police said: “Earlier today, we received a third-party report relating to an image shared on social media.”

“We take reports of this nature extremely seriously, and officers are conducting inquiries into the matter.”

Yusuf wrote on social media: “Zack Polanski has posted to his 713k Instagram followers a photo of a man

in a T-shirt calling for the beheading of Nigel Farage. Polanski is inciting murder. It must be treated as such by the police.”

The image, which has since been removed from Polanski’s Instagram account, was shared in a collaborative post with other accounts, as part of a carousel of images from a Green party event on Sunday.

The words on the T-shirt come from *Making Plans for Nigel*, a song by English rock band XTC, which was released as the lead single from the 1979 album *Drums and Wires*.

According to the BBC, Polanski has not been contacted by the police.



◀ The forest ablaze between Cestas and Marcheprime in the Gironde region yesterday. France is in a 'race against time' against wildfires as temperatures are set to rise again this week

PHOTOGRAPH: JULIEN SOULARD/EPA

France and Spain race to contain wildfires before further heatwaves begin

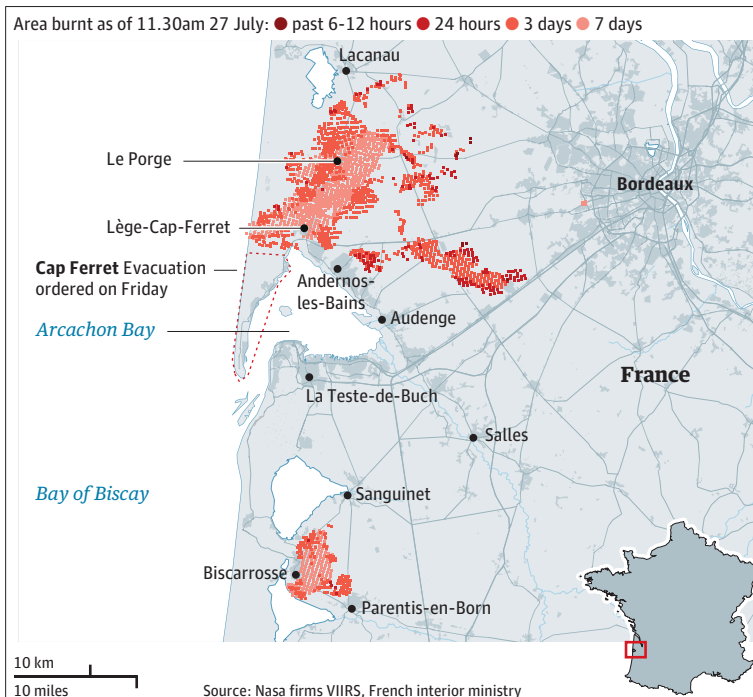
Angelique Chrisafis *Bordeaux*
Angela Giuffrida *Rome*
Jennifer Rankin *Brussels*

Firefighters in France and Spain are racing to bring huge wildfires under control before another heatwave this week that will complicate efforts to tame the flames.

Spain's interior minister, Fernando Grande-Marlaska, said yesterday and today were "absolutely crucial days" before temperatures rise again from tomorrow.

EU officials said wildfires could still be burning until November in what threatens to be a record-breaking year for the area of land burned.

A fire in the hilly terrain of Ávila, west of Madrid, has become Spain's largest on record, burning 50,000 hectares (123,000 acres). Authorities are battling two separate fires north-west of Madrid, taking the total area of scorched land near the capital to 70,000 hectares.



◀ People run with buckets in the forest near Le Porge where residents were evacuated from their homes over the weekend

PHOTOGRAPH: LORENA SOPENA LOPEZ/ANADOLU/GETTY IMAGES

France was also in "a race against time" to control wildfires before another heatwave this week, said Eric Brocardi, a fire service spokesperson. Weather forecasters have said temperatures could reach 40C (104F) in some parts of the country from today.

This would complicate efforts to control the wildfire in Gironde in south-west France, which the interior minister, Laurent Nuñez, described as "extremely intense and unpredictable ... generating its own winds and advancing erratically toward the Bordeaux metropolitan area".

The Gironde fire has so far burned 42,000 hectares, making it one of the biggest devastations of land in France since the second world war.

In the Cestas commune, about 10 miles (17km) from the city of Bordeaux, firefighters used mechanical diggers to uproot trees in an attempt to create a firebreak. The vast fire, which has triggered the evacuation of 220,000 people, had not progressed yesterday but was "not contained"

and remained "very complicated to control", Nuñez said.

Speaking after an emergency meeting of the French government, he described this year's wildfires as "completely exceptional". More than 116,000 hectares of forest and vegetation have burned since January, far exceeding the 70,000 hectares reported for the whole of 2025.

The French president, Emmanuel Macron, on a visit to Bordeaux, said: "The coming weeks will be tough and we have to hold out."

'It is the most painful manifestation of a climate emergency ... as a result our land is more vulnerable'

Pedro Sánchez
Prime minister of Spain

Pyrocumulonimbus The storm within a wildfire

What is a 'fire cloud'?

Pyrocumulonimbus, or "pyroCb", clouds are gigantic storm clouds that are generated by a wildfire.

Massive wildfires emit large amounts of energy and heat that rapidly rise in a smoke plume. When the plume rises high enough, low atmospheric pressure causes its air to cool, and the moisture condenses and forms a cloud. Such clouds can generate lightning strikes and windy conditions.

The smoke plume generated can form a pyrocumulonimbus cloud, which can reach altitudes of 10-15km (six to nine miles) and penetrate the stratosphere. Nasa calls them the "fire-breathing dragon of clouds".

"It's a full thunderstorm forming within the fire plume," says Rick McRae, from the University of New South Wales's bushfire research group. "They get up to roughly 10,000 cubic kilometres of the atmosphere, so they have a big impact."

Why are they so dangerous?

When pyrocumulonimbus clouds form, they can create winds that make the wildfires below spread even faster, and sometimes generate their own lightning, which can in turn ignite more fires further afield.

Experts say stronger wind gusts can create more unpredictable fire patterns and make conditions more dangerous for firefighters battling the blazes on the ground. "The cloud is confirmation that the fire is very dangerous," says McRae, who worked as a senior fire manager for 30 years. "The cloud is a confirmation that it's appropriate that lots of people have been evacuated."

How common are fire clouds?

Australia started experiencing pyrocumulonimbus clouds at the beginning of the century and experts say it appears they are becoming more common.

They formed during massive wildfires in California in 2022, but if confirmed, this would be the first time a pyroCb has been observed in France. "It's the first time France has had to explicitly consider the concept of a pyroCb," says McRae.

Why are they more frequent?

The climate crisis is creating more dangerous conditions for wildfires globally, and also the conditions that lead to the formation of pyrocumulonimbus clouds.

"It's full-on climate change," says McRae. "It's changes in the atmosphere, changes in the surface weather, changes in a lot of things."

Experts say climate models indicate these trends will increase in severity in the future.

The wildfires in Europe have happened in a region hit by successive heatwaves, with woodlands dried from a lack of rain since May. Forecasters warn another heatwave could hit France from today, with temperatures of 40C in some areas. **Kate Lamb**

He said a smaller fire in the adjoining Landes - which forced the evacuation of more than 30,000 people - was "contained" but remained "virulent". He added: "We must be extremely cautious over the next few hours and the coming days."

Spain's government said the 172,000 hectares of forested land burned this year was six times greater than the equivalent figure for 2025. Spain's prime minister, Pedro Sánchez, told a climate conference the wildfires were not isolated incidents. He said: "It is the most painful manifestation of a climate emergency that is making... wildfires more voracious and heatwaves more frequent, and as a result our land more vulnerable. It is no longer an exception. It is the rule."

The European Commission's lead official on the green transition, Teresa Ribera, said Europe was not prepared for the consequences of the climate crisis. In an interview with El País she said the commission would propose an adaptation strategy in October that would be much more comprehensive than policies implemented so far.

A series of heatwaves, including record-breaking temperatures in June, that scientists say would have been impossible without the climate crisis, has left parched soils and tinder-dry vegetation that have fuelled this summer's fires.

A commission official said the wildfire season had begun in April and could last until early November. Officials also stressed the rising risks for fighting wildfires from midweek in France, Spain and Greece.

The EU executive has coordinated the despatch of seven planes and four helicopters to France, as well as six planes and three forest firefighting teams to Spain, after the countries triggered the bloc's emergency assistance mechanism. EU officials have also been sent to the Bordeaux region to assist local authorities.

Officials stressed the unprecedented nature of recent fires, which have spread rapidly over large areas. A commission official said that a recent fire in southern Spain that killed 13 people reached speeds of 6km/h (more than 3mph), while firefighters are only able to react to fires moving at 300 metres an hour or less.

The scale of Europe's wildfires has raised questions about the continent's ability to respond. Italy is among about 10 European countries that have sent firefighting equipment or teams to France and Spain while grappling with its own blazes.

Firefighters fought to extinguish a major wildfire in the southern region of Puglia yesterday. More than 400 people, many of them tourists staying in campsites set among pine forests, were evacuated by sea from the Gargano peninsula on Sunday as the blaze, fanned by strong winds, encroached on beaches.

A further 58 people were evacuated from their homes in Maratea as a wildfire swept through neighbouring Basilicata. Italy is bracing for its fourth heatwave this year as temperatures edge up towards highs of 38C to 40C from tomorrow.

Smoke from the fires in France is continuing to cause a "marked deterioration" in air quality across a swathe of the Nouvelle-Aquitaine region and beyond, with health authorities warning about the danger.

'It felt like a disaster movie': mass evacuations on outskirts of Bordeaux

Continued from page 1

tens of thousands more were ordered by police to evacuate from more built-up, urban streets as the fire reached 9 miles from the outer edge of Bordeaux's vast suburban area.

Krishma and Nassir, who live in Mérignac, had to evacuate their suburban street at midnight on Friday. With their two children, aged 10 and eight, they quickly packed toothbrushes, toys, a change of clothes and personal documents into their car. Yesterday afternoon, they were sitting on camp beds among hundreds of people sheltering in a hangar at Bordeaux's exhibition centre. They had slept there for three nights and did not know when they would be allowed home. The fire had not reached their residential area, but with the French government warning that the blaze was "extremely intense and unpredictable", authorities would not yet allow a return, they said.

The couple's main feeling was great sadness to see the Gironde forest destroyed. Krishma said: "When we were in Afghanistan there were lots of explosions, suicide attacks, but that was related to around 30 years of war. When we came here, we never thought there would be a situation like this. It brought us back to the bad memories from our past."

Across the vast hangar, Yves, who used to work on road maintenance in Bordeaux, was sitting with his 13-year-old mastiff

▼ Nassir and Krishma in Bordeaux's exhibition centre, where they fled to after being told to leave their home

PHOTOGRAPH: ANGELIQUE CHRISAFIS/GUARDIAN



dog, Ichka. Yves had fled his suburban house and garden in Le Haillan, near Bordeaux, with his dog's bed under one arm and had carefully laid it out next to his camp bed. He had been ordered to evacuate early on Saturday.

"We had to leave because of the smoke," he said. His wife, an administrator who did not want to be named, said she still felt shaken. "It was terrifying," she said. "You would look up at the sky and it was completely orange, even after nightfall. It was bizarre. The fire was causing that, and it really made you anxious. I feel quite a lot of anger that all this forest has been lost. Seeing all that is beautiful in nature go up in smoke is extremely painful and sad."

Others who had fled slept in their cars. Loïc, 66, a widower who worked in the metals and glass industries before becoming a decorator, had to leave his house in Saint-Jean-d'Illac outside Bordeaux. "I had been watching this strange fog in the sky. It was a darkness almost like an eclipse," he said. "There was a kind of ochre mist as light from the sun was diffused through falling ash. So much ash was falling that my car was turned completely grey."

At 1am on Saturday, Loïc was woken by banging on the door from his neighbour, a fire officer, saying he had to leave immediately. He grabbed his wallet and car keys and ran to the car, leaving his mobile phone behind. There were so many people on the road and heading to the evacuation centre that he

decided to stop elsewhere and get a bit of sleep in his car.

When he woke on Saturday, listening to the news on the car radio, he knew he could not go home and headed instead for central Bordeaux, thinking the cinema would be a safe place.

"I watched the two-part Charles de Gaulle epic - the wrong way round, with the second film first, but I knew the story already - then I watched The Odyssey. Then I went back to sleep in my car."

The next day, he visited the graveyard where his wife was buried. Yesterday morning, he arrived at the Bordeaux evacuation centre to get information on what to do next. He felt deeply saddened by the loss of the forest. "My generation grew up really attached to nature," he said.

Florence, a former teaching assistant in a primary school, sat on a camp bed with her two cats in their travelling cases after having to evacuate Le Haillan. "I was distraught," she said. "I'm asthmatic, I put tape around the windows of my apartment but I could still smell the smoke seeping in under my front door, so I put down wet rags. The sky was orange and grey - with soot everywhere."

She said having to suddenly evacuate knowing a fire was raging in Gironde felt like something out of a war. "It felt like being in a disaster movie," she said. "I've always really loved disaster movies - but now I feel like I've actually been in one, so I don't ever want to watch a disaster movie again."



◀ A fire cloud near the village of Saumos, caused by a wildfire four times the size of Paris that has torn through the Gironde region

PHOTOGRAPH: EPA

Tenants fall ill in the heat after air conditioning 'switched off'

Peter Walker

Homeless families placed in temporary accommodation in London were told they could not use the in-built air conditioning as it had "not been offered as an amenity" for them, leading to two children being hospitalised during recent heatwaves.

Some residents at Britannia Point in Colliers Wood, south-west London, experienced such stifling conditions that young children became ill. The company managing some of the tenancies involved told the Guardian households in temporary accommodation had now been told they could use the air conditioning.

However, some residents said they were informed that if they used the system they would be billed via a standing charge rather than for how

long the air conditioning ran, which could result in bills of up to £500 for the summer.

The 19-storey glass-fronted block is owned by Criterion Capital, set up by the billionaire property magnate Asif Aziz. The company was accused earlier this year of trying to mass-evict tenants shortly before no-fault evictions were banned, something it has denied.

The temporary accommodation tenancies, in which councils place otherwise homeless households in properties for periods that can last from weeks to years, are managed separately by lettings agencies, one of them the London-based Aura Assets Management.

After a tenant complained to the building management about their air conditioning not working, they were sent an email, seen by the Guardian, which said that under the tenancy as

managed by Aura, air conditioning "has been switched off" for households in emergency accommodation.

It added: "Air conditioning has not been offered as an amenity under these arrangements, and the units cannot be switched back on as a result. You are welcome to use a portable fan or portable air conditioning unit at your own arrangement in the meantime."

Residents say the all-glass construction of the block and the fact that windows open only slightly mean that, without air conditioning, their flats have become unbearably hot.

"It is very difficult to cool the flats down," one resident said. "I find that as soon as I enter the building, I become much hotter, start feeling sick and sweat profusely."

Alice Rogers, who lives in Britannia Point with her four-year-old son, Hassan, said they regularly had



▲ Britannia Point in south-west London houses homeless families

to leave the block due to the heat. "There is a window that you can open, but ... whether you open it or close it, it's just literally the same. My son had a nosebleed the other day and was faint. I'm very much worried about his life."

Stuart Neaverson, a Labour councillor in Merton, the local authority, who has been trying to assist residents along with the local MP, Labour's Siobhain McDonagh, said

he had been told about two children being taken to hospital, calling the situation "disgraceful". He said: "With another heatwave imminent, it's vital that air conditioning is restored immediately to everyone in the tower to help prevent a tragedy."

A statement from Aura Assets Management said the air conditioning was now "fully operational and tenants have been advised that they are welcome to use it".

The company added: "Given the exceptionally warm weather this summer, we have also encouraged sensible rather than continuous use, simply to help residents avoid unexpectedly high utility bills."

When asked about the email sent to a resident saying tenants in temporary accommodation were not given access to air conditioning, the company said in a subsequent statement that this "was issued by the building management based on the information and operational arrangements in place at the time".

The email had been sent to a "couple of flats", the new statement said, adding: "The situation has since changed."

Criterion Capital was contacted for comment.

Highlands fire Cairngorms habitats face decades of recovery

Robyn Vinter

It is the jewel in the crown of the Highlands, one of Scotland's most impressive natural landscapes, but almost two weeks on from the start of an enormous wildfire that is tearing through moorland and forest, the Cairngorms national park is unrecognisable.

Swathes of blackened land were visible as low cloud cleared on Sunday, with smoke billowing into the air from large areas still ablaze.

Authorities have warned the danger is far from over in the worst fire the Cairngorms has ever seen. It will be weeks, if not months, before the blaze is fully extinguished, but emergency services are hoping to be able to stop it spreading.

Flames have claimed areas of the Caledonian pinewood forest, which contains Scots pine trees that are 300 years old, but most of the older forest has been saved by fire breaks urgently bulldozed into the land in the early days of the fire. It will still take decades for the habitat to recover.

"For rare habitat loss, it really is a challenge," says Ian Allsopp, the Forestry and Land Scotland planning manager for the north region. Larger animals, such as deer, would have escaped but smaller mammals, lizards, insects and ground-nesting birds are likely to have perished along with their homes.

A national park bylaw was introduced in April, banning campfires



▲ Large areas of the Caledonian pinewood forest have been destroyed after 12 days of 'cataclysmic' wildfires PHOTOGRAPHS: RSPB/AFP; ROBYN VINTER/THE GUARDIAN

and barbecues over the summer to help reduce ignition points. The vast majority of UK wildfires have a human origin - something as small as a discarded cigarette.

Police Scotland said on 25 July it was no longer treating the fire as a major incident. However, anxiety is still high, particularly as it was contained last week only for strong winds to spread it out of control, leading to the evacuation of Nethy Bridge village on the evening of 24 July. People have now been told they can return home.

"It's absolutely heartbreaking," says Sandy McCook, a retired press photographer who is from the village. "The flames on Friday were cataclysmic."

He is angry too. Many people feel the fire could have been prevented.

McCook shows the Guardian a photo he took of the wildfire when it was only the size of a tennis court.

"Had we had a helicopter there on government contract to deal with such incidents, that fire could have been dealt with within two hours of it being reported," he says. He wants to see a model similar to the Scottish air ambulance, with a specialist fire-fighting helicopter and crew able to tackle hard-to-reach fires.

Three private helicopters have been contracted to provide assistance in the Cairngorms, dropping approximately 750,000 litres of water a day on wildfire hotspots.

The Cairngorms is an "extremely challenging landscape", Allsopp says, with "access so difficult, you just can't get people up here".

The Scottish Greens have called for publicly available firefighting aircraft, saying Scotland "cannot continue to rely on a patchwork of private operators and borrowed resources".

This came after the government offered military support on Sunday but said it had no access to the specialist firefighting helicopters requested.

Firefighters said an "intensive operation" was still under way but better weather, including heavy rain and low winds, has slowed the fire. More than 75 firefighters remain at the scene, the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service said on Sunday. Those on the ground are anxious, given more dry weather is forecast.

"Wet weather is not enough to put out the fire on its own," says Allsopp. It requires helicopter waterbombing "for days and days and days" to contain it, he adds.

The operation is a massive coordination effort between Forestry and Land Scotland, the national park authority, the police, the fire service, the RSPB, the Highland Council and other partners. Allsopp says each organisation has worked well together. "At times, it has been completely overwhelming and we've been struggling to keep up. It feels like a war strategy."



◀ To play Gus Sackey in *Industry*, Jonsson prepared by immersing himself in a world of elite schools and Oxbridge privilege

PHOTOGRAPH: SIMON RIDGWAY/BBC/BAD WOLF/HBO

New Black Panther

Rising star from east London joins Marvel Cinematic Universe

Nadia Khomami

Arts and culture correspondent

Few characters carry the cultural weight of Black Panther. Since 2018, the Wakandan king has become a global symbol of Black excellence, credited with reshaping expectations of representation on screen. The first film grossed more than \$1.3bn (£0.98bn) worldwide, won three Oscars and became the first superhero movie nominated for best picture.

Now, six years after the death of the first film's star Chadwick Boseman, the British actor David Jonsson will play the son of T'Challa, Boseman's character, in Marvel Studios' Black Panther 3.

It is a remarkable ascent for an actor who grew up in the east London docklands, was expelled from school and, only a few years ago, was best known for his part in the HBO/BBC banking drama *Industry*.

Jonsson, 32, grew up in Custom House in Newham, the youngest of four children. His father worked as an IT engineer at Heathrow airport and his mother for the Metropolitan police. He describes his heritage as



▲ Jonsson, centre, as Pete McVries in the 2025 thriller *The Long Walk*

Creole, with roots in Nigeria, Sierra Leone, the Caribbean and Sweden.

He has spoken of the upheaval that followed his parents' separation when he was 11. He pushed boundaries at school and was eventually expelled for fighting as a teenager. "I wasn't a bad kid at all," the self-described introvert told the Guardian. "I was just a bit ... distracted at the time."

It was around then that Jonsson told his mother that he wanted to be an actor. At a new school in Hammersmith, west London - a 90-minute commute across the city - he began performing in school plays, and at 16 won a scholarship to the American Academy of Dramatic Arts in New York.

Returning to Britain two years later, Jonsson joined the National Youth Theatre before winning



▲ The late Chadwick Boseman in 2018 as the Wakandan king T'Challa

a place at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (Rada). He left drama school early to join a revival of *Mary Stuart*, starring Juliet Stevenson, which transferred to the West End; his 2021 performance in *And Breathe...* at the Almeida won him a Black British Theatre award.

Television came alongside his stage work. After early roles in the ITV detective drama *Endeavour* and the Fox UK espionage thriller *Deep State*, his television breakthrough came as Gus Sackey in *Industry*, the cult drama about young graduates clawing their way up at a London investment bank. To prepare, Jonsson immersed himself in a world of elite schools and Oxbridge privilege far removed from his own upbringing. He left the show in 2022. "Life is short, art is long," he later told GQ.

'Every character I do, no matter what, I'm going to be a Black man first'

David Jonsson
British actor



◀ David Jonsson describes his heritage as Creole, with roots in Nigeria, Sierra Leone, the Caribbean and Sweden

PHOTOGRAPH: SUKI DHANDA/ THE GUARDIAN

His ascent since then has been rapid. His first film lead came in Raine Allen-Miller's 2023 romcom *Rye Lane*, which premiered at Sundance to critical acclaim and earned him a British Independent Film award (Bifa) nomination.

He became the first Black lead in a television adaptation of Agatha Christie with the BBC's *Murder Is Easy*. Then came the sci-fi horror *Alien: Romulus* in 2024, which earned him the Bafta rising star award; the Stephen King adaptation *The Long Walk*; and the British prison film *Wasteman*, which earned him his second Bifa nomination.

Jonsson has long been conscious of what his roles represent. "Every character I do, no matter what, I'm going to be a Black man first," he has said.

Home Office blocks evacuation of refugee families from Gaza

Diane Taylor

The Home Office is blocking the evacuation of dozens of women and children from Gaza despite the Foreign Office saying it is ready to get people out of the region.

Last September, the Home Office announced it was suspending refugee family reunion applications and that new, more restrictive rules would be announced in the spring. So far, there

has been no announcement and the process remains suspended. Applications made before the announcement continue to be processed.

The Home Office and the Foreign Office are involved in evacuations from Gaza via Jordan. However, the Home Office is not providing the required onward travel assurance (OTA) and is using legal challenges to block families coming to the UK.

The Home Office says biometrics must be obtained before families travel to Jordan, even though the

visa centre in Gaza has been closed since October 2023.

Lawyers for the families stranded in Gaza say the Home Office appears to be taking a harsher line than with refugees from other countries. They say in some cases, the Home Office has stated that the family members, including small children, pose a security risk because they come from a "territory where terrorists operate".

The Guardian has reported on the case of Bassem Abudagga, a PhD student separated from his family. In a communication with his lawyers on 15 July, in response to descriptions of insanitary conditions and frequent bombings, the Home Office said: "The conditions your clients face in Gaza alone are not considered to amount

to compelling circumstances under the [relevant] guidance."

Another Palestinian refugee in the UK is separated from his wife, their three children and his 17-year-old nephew, orphaned by the war. He said: "My family are in constant



▲ Displaced Palestinians in Gaza hope to reunite with family members

danger and I worry about them every minute of every day ... I don't understand how a mother and her children can be considered a security threat."

Sarah Crowe, a solicitor at the law firm representing some of the families, said: "The UK government has abandoned vulnerable families in Gaza after promising to assist them. The Home Office is blocking family reunification when the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office is ready and willing to evacuate them."

A Home Office spokesperson said: "Under our reforms to create a fairer asylum system, family reunion will no longer be automatic. Those seeking to bring family members to the UK will need to meet stricter criteria."

In Sport
Tour de France
Pogacar is a five-time winner. But what's to stop him going further?
 Page 36 →



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National Bill Oddie 1941-2026



‘Sparky, smart and sometimes spiky’: friends pay tribute as Bill Oddie dies at 85

Hannah J Davies

Bill Oddie, who found fame with the TV comedy *The Goodies* before establishing himself as an authority on wildlife, presenting television series including the BBC's *Springwatch*, has died aged 85.

Colleagues and old friends paid tribute yesterday, with the TV nature presenter Chris Packham describing him as an “utter joy to be with”.

Oddie's agent, David Foster, announced his death yesterday, describing him as “the country's best-loved birder”.

Foster said: “Bill was a multi-talented celebrity - wildlife presenter, broadcaster, comedian, writer, songwriter, musician and conservationist. Yet it was never fame that he valued.

“Instead he encouraged us to respect and protect the environment. He taught us the wonder of it. He

protested, lobbied and campaigned for it. He led the way and people of all ages and backgrounds responded to his call. And such a massive contribution to conservation will never be forgotten.”

Oddie was born in Rochdale in Lancashire and grew up in Birmingham, later studying at Cambridge. It was there that he met Tim Brooke-Taylor and Graeme Garden, with whom he formed the sketch group *The Goodies*. The trio appeared on the BBC from 1970 to 1980. The show was revived by London Weekend Television for a 1981 Christmas special and an ITV six-part series in 1982.

As well as creating and performing comic musical numbers with *The Goodies*, including *The Funky Gibbon* and *Black Pudding Bertha* (*The Queen of Northern Soul*), Oddie's music projects included a role in the English National Opera production of *The Mikado* in the late 1980s.

An avid birdwatcher, Oddie made



▲ Bill Oddie at home in his garden in 2008. Left, with his Goodies co-stars Graeme Garden and Tim Brooke-Taylor

PHOTOGRAPHS: VICKI COUCHMAN/CAMERA PRESS; EAMONN MCCABE/THE GUARDIAN

► Oddie with Garden and Brooke-Taylor as The Goodies on the Bay City Rollers' music TV show *Shang-a-Lang* in 1975

PAUL STOKES/TV TIMES/GETTY



forays into natural history television in the 1970s and 1980s, going on to present wildlife series for the BBC, including *Springwatch*, and publishing several books on conservation.

He said in 2014 that he still felt a lingering sadness that his days on *Springwatch* had been cut short, and he rarely watched the programme.

"I very much miss it, but when I

do see it, it brings back many happy memories and I like to think I contributed to its success," he said.

"It's still so well loved and helps encourage people to enjoy the natural world. That's all to the good because I fear so many people wear earphones for their phones and music players that increasingly they miss out on everyday joys like birdsong."



▲ The Goodies appeared on the BBC from 1970-80, before a switch to ITV

Oddie had depression and bipolar disorder. In 2015, he told the Guardian that he had "inherited the same genetic flaw" as his mother, who was diagnosed with schizophrenia but may have also had bipolar disorder.

In September 2020, Oddie said on X that he had been "very ill most of this summer. Lithium toxicity. Almost fatal! I am still here but very confused about most things! But then aren't many of us. It fuddles my brain. Confusion. Will I return? I Really dunno. I do hope so. Please wish me luck. XX." Lithium is prescribed as a mood stabiliser.

Packham, who replaced Oddie as the face of *Springwatch* in 2009, said: "Bill was invariably funny and occasionally furious. He loved birds and loathed those who harmed them. He was delightfully unpredictable, sparky, smart and at times a bit spiky.

"Critically, he really knew his stuff, and his passion was true - he didn't just pick up his binoculars on telly, he went birding whenever he could. So he was genuine and that's why we loved him, he never needed a script, and took scant interest in any he was given."

The Monty Python star Eric Idle met Oddie while at Cambridge, and they both rose to fame as actors and comics in the 1960s. Idle wrote on X: "I'm very sad Bill Oddie has gone. He was sick for some time and I wrote to him. He auditioned me for The Pembroke Revue in 1963 and I stepped into his roles for The Edinburgh Festival when the Cambridge Footlights went to the West End.

"We watched England win the World Cup together at Wembley in 66. He was a very fine songwriter and I learned a lot from him. He came to France and is in my book. We even had Chelsea season tickets together. I miss him."

The RSPCA's chief executive, Jo Rowland, said: "Everyone at the RSPCA is deeply saddened by the loss of our former vice-president Bill Oddie OBE. While his comedy, music and, of course, work with The Goodies delighted so many, his tireless commitment to British wildlife will define so much of his extraordinary life. Bill was an exceptional and steadfast champion for the natural world, whose passion for birds and wildlife was truly infectious."

Oddie is survived by his wife, Laura, and three daughters - Rosie, from his marriage to Laura, and Kate and Bonnie from his first marriage to the jazz musician Jean Hart.

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Appreciation

Goodies will give fans a smile among the sadness

Mark Lawson

Bill Oddie, who has died aged 85, had two separate, substantial TV presences - as a comedy actor and an ornithologist. Both brought him fame but also pain.

The peak of the former career was 76 episodes from 1970-82 of *The Goodies*, which he co-wrote and co-starred in with Graeme Garden and Tim Brooke-Taylor. They played an eccentric trio of investigators and fixers who rode into action on a three-seater bicycle called a "trandem".

As a birdwatcher, his onscreen zenith was *Springwatch*, which he initially co-hosted with Kate Humble, from 2005. It began a BBC Two natural history franchise marking the change of seasons, its success leading to wintry, autumnal and summery spin-offs. Binoculars lowered to show eyes awed or enthused, Oddie became TV's signature birdwatcher.

Born in Rochdale, he came early to both comedy and ornithology. He was a teenager when his sightings first appeared in the annual report of the West Midland Bird Club. In his early 20s, he appeared in the West End and on Broadway in transfers of the Cambridge University revue in which he first worked professionally with Brooke-Taylor and Garden, who is now the only survivor of the three.

Oddie wrote the music for the revue and then *The Goodies*, who released five spinoff singles in 1974-75, spending a combined 38 weeks in the charts, with *The Funky Gibbon*, a jungle dance song, reaching the Top 10.

Each of Oddie's TV hits, though, was overshadowed by sadness. In the case of *Springwatch*, it was personal. Particularly bad incidents of the bipolar condition he experienced throughout his life led him to miss two series. He returned to the programme, but his 2008

'Binoculars lowered to show eyes awed or enthused, Oddie was TV's signature birdwatcher'

departure, which he made clear was not voluntary, was triggered, by his account, by another serious depressive downturn.

In the case of *The Goodies*, there was an underlying resentment shared by Brooke-Taylor and Garden relating to the show's treatment by the BBC. The series attracted 8 million viewers at its mid-70s peak and won the Silver Rose of Montreux, the second prize at Europe's leading TV festival. It was for *Kitten Kong*, an inspired movie spoof in which a massive cat terrorises London.

However, *The Goodies* was never valued by many corporation executives who - due to the relatively high quotient of slapstick, puns and visual gags involving animals - designated it a children's show, which was intended as an insult and taken as such. For what proved to be the final series, the trio moved to London Weekend Television.

Unlike most hit shows of its period, *The Goodies* has not been regularly repeated. This upset and frustrated Oddie, Brooke-Taylor and Garden. During the home video and DVD boom, when it sometimes seemed that the BBC was releasing all the material ever shown, the trio negotiated a box-set release with a commercial outfit, which partly redressed the neglect.

A few other shows from the era have also been denied repeats and releases because they contain language or attitudes now considered unacceptable. BBC off-the-record briefers have sometimes suggested this was why *The Goodies* has been so difficult to watch or buy. There is an occasion on which the three men start to apply blackface, but it occurred in an extraordinary 1975 episode called *South Africa*. This begins with the Goodies undertaking an advertising campaign to attract Britons to South Africa and ends in a Britain with a Black Enoch Powell presiding over a regime of reverse apartheid.

Although there is some silly wordplay - at one point, a regime of "apart-height" requires the diminutive Oddie to become a slave to his taller colleagues - the broadly progressive politics and complexity of the storyline make the "children's television" tag seem absurd. Indeed, absurdity is a more fitting label for South Africa and many other editions.

In *The Goodies*, the writer-actors played exaggerations of aspects of their characters: Garden (a qualified doctor) professorial and absent-minded, Brooke-Taylor posh and patriotic and Oddie sulky and scrappy. Those characteristics meant that some found Oddie hard to work with - which may have contributed to his departure from *Springwatch* - but some such behaviour was explained, if not entirely excused, by his mental health issues.

Oddie was quite right, though, to be annoyed by the diminishment in BBC and TV history of *The Goodies*, memories of which will make its viewers smile amid the sadness at his death. His admirers will also hope that any afterlife contains a chorus of birdsong.



Are you ok with your local funeral director being unregulated?

You need a licence to be a taxi driver, a tattooist or to have an ice-cream van. But anyone can set themselves up to be a funeral director. Because right now, the funeral profession is completely unregulated.

This lack of regulation has led to a number of scandals in recent years – including the case of Robert Bush, a funeral director who is being sentenced this week after pleading guilty to 67 charges, including dozens of counts of preventing a lawful and decent burial.

Of course, many funeral directors do a great job supporting families, but it can be difficult knowing who to trust at an emotional time.

The answer? Strong regulation, to ensure everyone can have confidence in the funeral director they choose.

We've produced a comprehensive proposal on how funeral regulation could be introduced and we've got the backing of MPs from different political parties to take it forward. You can also sign our petition at: purecremation.co.uk/petition

By contrast, some funeral trade associations, advocate 'co-regulation'. That would mean they could influence the standards funeral directors would need to meet. We don't think that's right – we believe regulation only works when it is independent.

Until funerals are regulated, here are three questions you might like to ask your funeral director if you need to arrange a funeral for a loved one:

1. How will my loved one rest with you before their cremation? Do your premises have CCTV, access control and refrigeration?
2. Are all of your staff DBS checked and professionally-trained?
3. Which company will perform the cremation?

If you need help arranging a funeral with a company you can trust, please call us free on 0800 470 23 93 any time of the day or night. And to sign the petition to call for funeral regulation, visit: purecremation.co.uk/petition



Industrial poultry farms fuelling dangerous mix of bacteria, study finds

Hannah Devlin
Science correspondent

Industrial chicken farming is accelerating the spread of the world’s most common bacterial cause of diarrhoea, scientists have found.

The study found a dramatic increase in the exchange of *campylobacter* strains between wild birds and chickens as farming has intensified, creating the ideal conditions for the bacteria to mix, spread and acquire new traits.

There has also been a rise in antimicrobial resistance (AMR) traits in circulating strains, raising concerns that serious illness in people will be more difficult to treat.

“As the chicken population has exploded, they’ve increasingly picked up strains from different wild birds and become a cauldron of bacterial evolution,” said Prof Sam Sheppard of the University of Oxford, a senior author of the paper. “Lots of

strains come together and hybridise. We do not want that, because that’s where new Frankenstein monster bugs emerge.”

Campylobacter is the most common bacterial cause of diarrhoea, causing more than three times as many gastroenteritis cases in the UK each year as all other monitored foodborne bacteria combined. An estimated 60-80% of *campylobacter* cases are caught from raw chicken.

“Cooking kills pathogens, but just a tiny splash and it’s on your lettuce leaves or your hands or your knife,” said Sheppard.

Most people will get better without treatment, but sometimes antibiotics are required and an infection also raises the risk of irritable bowel syndrome (IBS).

Rising rates of AMR, which occurs when bacteria resist drugs designed to kill them, mean that some antibiotics that were previously used to treat *campylobacter* infections are no longer effective.



The latest work suggests the evolution of the infection is being fuelled by the unprecedented scale of chicken production.

Since the 1960s, global chicken numbers have increased seven-fold to approximately 27bn birds, accounting for about 70% of all bird biomass on Earth. Intensive breeding has led to “super-growing” chickens that reach adult size and are slaughtered at about five weeks old.

The latest work, published in the journal Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, analysed nearly 2,800 bacterial genomes collected from chickens and wild birds in 30

▲ *Intensive chicken farming is creating ideal conditions for strains of campylobacter to gain new traits*
PHOTOGRAPH: MARTON MONUS/REUTERS

‘It’s a massive risk to us... We can’t continue to produce chickens at this huge capacity’

Sam Sheppard
Study’s senior author

countries, including the UK, US and China, between 1979 and 2024.

The dataset allowed the scientists to reconstruct the evolutionary trees of the diverse strains, including the rate of exchange between hosts.

Prior to the domestication of the chicken, about 5,000 years ago, strains of *campylobacter* tended to be tightly linked to individual species of birds, with little known cross-infection. As numbers increased, the picture changed, with an estimated 100-fold increase in transitions of strains between chickens and wild birds since 1900 compared with pre-domestication – a trend that appears to have continued steeply across recent decades.

“The scale is what’s bad,” said Sheppard. “By adjusting the world’s ecosystems in this dramatic way it leads to the evolution of pathogens within those birds. That’s a massive risk to us. We can’t continue to produce chickens at this huge capacity.”

The researchers also identified genetic changes in *campylobacter* that were associated with adaptation to the chicken environment. These included genes involved in antimicrobial resistance, which can help bacteria survive and thrive in modern poultry production systems where antibiotics are routinely given to encourage rapid growth or to keep disease under control in densely packed sheds.



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Eyewitness





Meltdown

Deep fissures split the lower reaches of the Rhône glacier above Gletsch in the Swiss Alps. The glacier, which is the source of the Rhône, has been retreating at a rate of 10cm a day, according to the Swiss glacier monitoring network, Glamos, losing more than 4 metres of ice in a single month due to hot weather.

PHOTOGRAPH:
FABRICE COFFRINI/
AFP/GETTY

World



◀ People visit the beach in the Iranian city of Bandar Abbas yesterday as ships continue to wait in the strait of Hormuz

PHOTOGRAPH:
RAZIEH POUDAT/
ISNA/REUTERS

Trump warns US will return to 'strong military action' if Iran diplomacy fails

Patrick Wintour
Diplomatic editor

Donald Trump has once again warned that the US will return to "strong military action" against Iran if diplomatic efforts do not bring a rapid resolution to the crisis in the Middle East.

"We are in very deep talks with Iran. If they don't work out, we will go back to very strong military action," the US president told Axios yesterday. Asked how long he would allow the talks to proceed, he answered: "Not much time. Either it goes fast or not at all."

At a rally in Michigan later, he said: "You can't bribe them. You've got to beat them, and we'll beat the hell out of them. But we'll see how it turns out. Right now, there are very friendly negotiations going on."

Tehran meanwhile said there were no direct talks with the US to end the conflict, which began in late February

and has rocked the region and the global economy.

Iran's foreign ministry spokesperson, Esmail Baghaei, said: "Mediators may convey messages from the American side to us regarding current developments in the region, but at present, we are not engaged in any negotiations with the United States."

The diplomatic back and forth came as Oman and Iran drew closer to an agreement in principle on the future management of the strait of Hormuz, but remain unable to resolve Tehran's demand that all ships passing through the waterway must pay some kind of transit fee or toll to a consortium led by the two countries.

Oman and Iran met for talks in Tehran over the weekend that may hold the key to preventing further fighting.

Perceived progress in the talks – backed by China, Qatar and Pakistan – is understood to have fed into the US decision to pause its attacks on Iran after nearly two weeks.

Senior US officials are also reported to have warned Trump over dwindling US munitions stockpiles, and the impact of Iranian reprisals on US bases in the region. The top US military commander in the Middle East, Adm Brad Cooper, reportedly said the bombing campaign had reached the limit of its effectiveness.

The US attacks were described by Washington as a response to repeated Iranian breaches of the memorandum of understanding signed last month, including by trying to prevent shipping transiting the strait through a southern route overseen by the US.

'The aim is to develop mechanisms to ensure safe shipping'

Esmail Baghaei
Iranian spokesperson

Iran argues that the southern route breaks the ceasefire agreement, which it insists left Iran in sole charge of how the strait was reopened.

A diplomat said: "The aim of the Tehran talks is to marry the Iran and Oman proposals so what emerges is clearly compliant with the law of the sea, and internationally acceptable."

At a Tehran press conference, Baghaei denied the pause in fighting amounted to an informal ceasefire.

Oman has been trying to persuade Tehran that any plan for charging fees in the strait must be voluntary, to comply with the law of the sea. It has proposed a model similar to that governing the strait of Malacca, in which countries voluntarily contribute to a fund that provides environmental and safety services to shipping.

Oman argues that a similar entity could be set up in the strait of Hormuz with the agreement of the UN and the International Maritime Organization. The IMO secretary general, Arsenio

Dominguez, has said the Malacca strait model is worth considering.

Iran's department of environment has drafted its own plan, under which the damage caused by "the annual passage of over 50,000 ships and oil tankers through the strait" must be compensated. Under the plan, Iran would be able to collect "fees" from passing vessels proportional to the type of ship, cargo volume, navigation history and history of pollution.

Baghaei described the talks with Oman as useful and constructive, but said they had nothing to do with the US. "The goal is for Iran and Oman, as two coastal states, to develop mechanisms to ensure safe shipping in the strait of Hormuz, while respecting the sovereign rights of the two coastal states and also preserving Iran's security and national interests," he said.

Oman is in a tight spot since it knows the US is opposed to the introduction of tolls, but might accept a very clearly delineated system of fees for specific services.

The talks come as the US continues to encourage commercial shipping to test the strength of the Iranian blockade. Iranian officials reported that six vessels with their navigation systems switched off attempted to pass through on Sunday. One was fired upon and the others were turned back to the Persian Gulf.

New mission
Astronauts launch US
democracy campaign
 Page 24

'It rained for 10 days'
Extreme weather and
flash floods hit Asia
 Page 27



Pentagon lists more than 600 casualties in update of war database

Marina Dunbar

The Pentagon updated its official war casualty database over the weekend, adding more than 140 wounded service members.

The Defense Casualty Analysis System (DCAS) also introduced a new casualty category labelled "Overseas Operations" for personnel killed and wounded "starting July 7".

According to the updated database, the official toll for the earlier phase of the US-Iran war - known, according to the US military, as Operation Epic Fury - now stands at 14 service members killed and more than 400 wounded in action.

These figures have been a point of contention after the Pentagon reduced the totals from 18 deaths and 482 wounded, which had been recorded just days earlier.

The dispute comes after the collapse of the ceasefire with Iran and the resumption of near-daily airstrikes beginning on 6 July.

Analysts and officials have questioned whether casualties from the renewed fighting should be counted separately from Operation Epic Fury, a move that would be unprecedented.

The Trump administration is seeking to classify the renewed military campaign as separate from Operation Epic Fury.

The change is tied to the War Powers Act of 1973, which requires the president to end military operations within 60 days unless Congress authorises an extension. The Trump administration has argued that the April ceasefire with Iran paused the clock on 1 May for the conflict's initial period. The separate casualty count beginning on 7 July follows that interpretation.

The shift became apparent earlier this week when the Pentagon's official online list of service members killed in the Iran war did not include the four soldiers who died during renewed fighting over the weekend. Their names, however, were included in a Pentagon press release announcing the formal transfer of their remains back to the US on Wednesday.

Combined with the updated Operation Epic Fury totals, the new Pentagon figures show that 18 US troops have been killed and 624 wounded since the US launched its war against Iran on 28 February.

Lawmakers from both parties have challenged the administration's interpretation of the War Powers Act timeline.



All creatures The man who braved Lebanon strikes to help the animals

William Christou
 Zefta

During Israel's 2006 war against Hezbollah, Houssein Hamze woke up one night to the sound of barking. Alarmed, he got up to check on the dog - his first rescue pet. Moments later, a bomb dropped next to his home and a piece of shrapnel landed right where he had been sleeping.

"I swear to God, he really saved me from death. Animals always possess a sixth sense we don't have," Hamze said.

Twenty years and two wars later, the 57-year-old is still repaying his debt to the dog that saved his life.

Soon after his near-death experience, Hamze founded the Mashala shelter in the village of Zefta, south Lebanon, to take care of animals in the area. In normal times he takes in strays, but in wartime, he is the only lifeline for animals in the area.

One morning recently, Hamze strolled through his small farm where the shelter is located as a line of dogs followed behind him. He opened an enclosure where two camels - rescued from the Bekaa valley last year - stood among chickens and geese.

"This is Jamoola, and her son, Jamool. She is so sweet. When I don't visit for more than two days, she starts to cry. And when I come back, she wraps her neck around

me as if she's hugging me," Hamze said, as the camel placed her head in his lap, nuzzling him as he scratched behind her ears. Jamool, a calf who was still nursing, hid his face behind his mother.

The donation-supported farm hosts an eclectic collection of rescues. About 200 dogs gnawed on donated chicken feet while horses whinnied at guests. Chickens ran between the camels' legs while geese patrolled the perimeter of their enclosure. A small conspiracy of ravens flew rings around the forested valley of the farm.

Hamze was one of about 20 people who stayed behind in his village during the last Hezbollah-Israel war that started on 2 March and forced approximately a quarter

of Lebanon's population to flee their homes. He stayed to take care of the animals, despite the constant risk of death from Israeli drones and warplanes.

"Many people fled and left their animals behind during their displacement - some of them left their animals tied up. We would go out, untie them and leave them water," said Hamze. He pointed to one dog he rescued, Lulu, who lost a chunk of her tail in an airstrike. About 50 dogs came to the shelter during the war by themselves, seeking out food.

During the conflict, Hamze would make daily rounds in his beaten-up truck, distributing dry food to the abandoned dogs and livestock in the villages of south



▲ Hamze with some of his rescue dogs at the Mashala shelter - he said 50 dogs arrived by themselves seeking food PHOTOGRAPH: OLIVER MARSDEN/THE GUARDIAN

▲ Hamze hugs Jamoola, a camel he rescued from the Bekaa valley along with her calf, Jamool

PHOTOGRAPH: OLIVER MARSDEN/THE GUARDIAN

Lebanon. It was not easy work: food was hard to secure, and he would often have to carry jerrycans of water long distances to dogs in more remote areas. On several occasions an airstrike hit a building next to where he was working. Once during his feeding rounds, Hamze stumbled on the corpse of a man recently struck by a drone.

"By the end, all the dogs knew me. I would beep and they would come running," he said.

Hamze would travel between the villages despite an Israeli drone that hovered overhead. He displayed the "Mashala" animal shelter sign on the roof of the truck so the drone could identify him - but still it was no guarantee he would not be targeted. Drones would regularly strike people in the area, ranging from Hezbollah fighters to medics, to a man and his friend who returned home to collect some clothes.

"I wasn't afraid for myself. I was only afraid for the animals. I kept thinking: 'If I die, who will look after them?'" Hamze said.

Despite his bravado, Hamze quietly made arrangements in case he was killed. He sent eight donkeys to a shelter in Beirut, fearful that they would not be able to survive on their own if he died.

Since a ceasefire in June ended most of the fighting in Lebanon, life has almost gone back to normal for Hamze and the animals in his shelter. The thud of artillery is more distant now and Hamze is occupied with the more mundane tasks: repairing irrigation tubing chewed on by dogs, and chasing animals with a syringe to give them tick treatments.

His work during the war made him a minor celebrity in Lebanon. Videos of him braving drones to feed dogs went viral, prompting an outpouring of donations. With the war no longer in the headlines, donations are slowly drying up.

Hamze is still famous in the village though. His farm is hard to find, but everyone in the area knows him.

And there was more work than ever, Hamze said, as displaced people returned to their homes and began calling him to assist with animal rescues. Scrolling through his WhatsApp, he estimated he received about 500 messages and calls a day reporting animals that needed help.

Hamze said he hoped that one day the shelter would not be necessary. Maybe with a proper respect for the sanctity of life, people would stop fighting, he said.

"The conclusion is this: if you don't have compassion for animals, you won't have compassion for human beings. Believe me," Hamze said, before planting a kiss on Jamoola's outstretched head.



◀ Cady Coleman – seen here after landing in Kazakhstan in 2011 – says Astronauts for America aims to restore public faith in US democracy

PHOTOGRAPH: MIKHAIL METZEL/AP

'Our country is the mission' More than 100 ex-Nasa astronauts launch vote campaign

Richard Luscombe

Orbiting 250 miles above the US in the International Space Station, astronaut Cady Coleman did not look down and see red or blue states, sanctuary cities or communities occupied by thousands of federal ICE agents.

What she saw was a single land from the Pacific Ocean to the Atlantic; no borders or partitions – just a united America and a population valuing its equality and convinced that what brought them together was far greater than anything that divided them.

It is that unique perspective, witnessed by only a few hundred people in history, that led Coleman and dozens of other retired Nasa colleagues to form Astronauts for America, a nonpartisan advocacy group of fellow space explorers.

Launched, pun intended, to coincide with the 250th anniversary of the US this year, the alliance wants to restore faith in, and support of, the constitutional democracy of the US. It seeks to encourage politicians and the public to commit to the principles of the constitution, something its members believe has fallen into a black hole in recent times.

As Coleman puts it succinctly, the mission means: "Being willing to speak out when we know something isn't right." She says: "All 108 of us, we're very

different people from each other. Some of us have very different politics and we certainly each have our own opinions about the current administration, about past administrations.

"But during my spaceflights, in looking at all the patches and the names on my astronaut jacket, I literally didn't know and never asked about their politics. It was just not part of the mission.

"The fact is now we're all together, and what we're fighting for is something that's common to all of us: we're fighting for our country, for our democracy, and for decision making and restoring the faith in our institutions."

Coleman, 65, who flew on two space shuttle missions and logged a total of 180 days in space, which included a lengthy tour of duty on the ISS between 2010 and 2011, will join her colleagues on Astronauts for America's Vote for Freedom campaign this summer and autumn.

In the run-up to November's US midterm elections, they plan to tour about 60 college and university campuses, many in swing states, talking to young and first-time voters and encouraging them to exercise their right to be part of the country's democracy.

"Every one of these voters can change the course of our nation. It's like making a course correction in space," she adds.

"My astronaut colleague Ron Garan gives this example: a small adjustment now is a large distance later, like getting to the moon or

not. A small course correction now can really mean big things as the ship continues on its course."

The who's who of Astronauts for America includes some standout names. There are dozens of space shuttle crew members from that programme's 135 missions, including Charles Bolden and Bill Nelson, who both went on to become Nasa administrators, and in Nelson's case a US senator.

The oldest is Rusty Schweickart, 90, who flew on Apollo 9 in March 1969, four months before the first moon landing.

Bolden, a retired Marine Corps major general who flew four shuttle missions between 1986 and 1994, is one of the most outspoken of the group, having served as head

of Nasa for both of Barack Obama's terms of office to January 2017.

"All of us have been kind of watching the deterioration in the US over the last few decades," he says. "It seems like every president issues more and more executive orders because they can't get action out of Congress, or they don't want action out of Congress."

"I was upset when President Obama started relying on executive orders. I understood the reason – I was in the administration and saw the incalitrance of Congress and their desire not to give him any wins, so I could understand where he was coming from.

"But still, that's not in accordance with the constitution." Bolden says that "failure to

adhere to the constitution the way we think the framers intended it" placed the country in peril, as well as more recent assaults on democratic norms by the Trump administration.

"We may not make it if we don't do something now," he says. "We may not have another presidential term to try to make a difference."

Linda Godwin, a former Nasa astronaut and scientist whose four shuttle missions spanned 10 years between 1991 and 2001, with 38 days in space and two spacewalks, is part of the group's steering committee helping to direct its strategy, which includes plans to "grade" midterm congressional candidates on their commitment to constitutional principles.

"As astronauts, perhaps we would have a voice," she says. "Not that we're necessarily more knowledgeable or smarter or anything like that, but we have a background in which we have participated in big missions that depended on truth and accountability, and evidence and trust."

"We worked with people who have many different opinions on different things, and we know how to work together to get the mission done. And we kind of felt like, you know, right now, we think our country is the mission."

The astronauts met on 20 July in Los Angeles to launch their Vote for Freedom campaign, a rare gathering of many of the nation's space pioneers on the 57th anniversary of the 20 July 1969 Apollo 11 moon landing.

The occasion and date were full of poignancy for those present, turning their inspirational past experiences into a message of hope for the future, with a meticulously planned checklist to try to achieve it, just like the scores of missions they once flew.

"It's important to speak up when things are happening in our country that are moving us away from the democratic society that we all grew up with, and that we all supported as government employees as well," says Ellen Ochoa, another four-time shuttle flier who in 1993 became the first Latina and the first person to play the flute in space.

"One reason we're reaching out at college campuses is that for a lot of the students this might be their first opportunity to vote, or they may not be in the habit of voting and not thought too much about exercising this right," she adds.

"The message is it's really important to vote. That's the most important right you have in a democracy. And it's also not only a right, but I feel it's really a responsibility. A democracy depends on the people actively participating, and this is the single most important thing that people can do."

The assembled astronauts agreed at the Vote for Freedom meeting on 20 July on a single, space-themed statement that they could all use to encapsulate the important purpose of their voting campaign.

It does not disappoint: "Going to the polls is one small step for you, and one giant leap for our country."



▲ Ex-astronauts Ellen Ochoa (second from left), Charlie Bolden and Steve Smith at the nonpartisan group's launch in LA PHOTOGRAPH DAVID CRANE/GETTY

Calls for tougher laws as far right seeks to mobilise outrage after Berlin Pride attack

Deborah Cole *Berlin*
Sinéad Campbell

German officials have called for a tightening of laws for known extremists after a deadly attack in Berlin on one of Europe's biggest Pride parades, as the far right seeks to mobilise outraged voters before three key state elections.

The anti-migration, anti-Islam Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), the top party in national opinion polls, accused the government of failing to tackle Islamist radicalism on German soil, while the conservative chancellor, Friedrich Merz, pledged to act with "prudence but also determination" to address security gaps.

Abdul Ballout, a 21-year-old German national of Lebanese descent who was well-known to police, is believed to have rammed a van into a crowd in Tiergarten park late on Saturday, next to the finale of annual LGBTQ+ celebrations.

After crashing the vehicle, which had been rented in Ballout's name, he allegedly attacked people with a large knife. A 65-year-old Polish woman died and 29 others were injured.

An hours-long manhunt ended

when police shot Ballout dead in a garden allotment in the Spandau district on Sunday after officers said he ran at them with a "bladed weapon" when they attempted to arrest him.

In response to the attack, in the UK armed police officers will be deployed at the nation's biggest Pride festival in Brighton and Hove this week, which attracts about 500,000 people.

A spokesperson for Sussex police said "uniformed policing, plain-clothed officers and specialist teams including armed officers" will be deployed across the city "as part of our comprehensive plans for policing this event". They added: "We encourage everyone attending Pride to enjoy the celebrations, look out for one another, and report any concerns" to an officer or a member of security, or call 999 in an emergency.

The UK defence secretary said the Berlin attack was "absolutely horrific" and showed why Pride celebrations were still necessary.

Wes Streeting said Pride events in the UK were "always well policed", and they struck the right balance between public safety and allowing people to celebrate.

Merz said yesterday that the victims in Berlin had been rallying for



◀ *Flowers and flags left at the Brandenburg Gate in support of victims of Saturday's Berlin attack, in which one person died and 29 were injured*

PHOTOGRAPH:
FILIP SINGER/EPA

"openness, diversity and freedom", and were assaulted by "an Islamist who sought to attack those values".

As thousands gathered for a ceremony at the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin to mourn the victims, it emerged police had been aware of the risk posed by Ballout as an Islamist extremist with previous arrests for bodily harm, extortion and robbery. Security authorities said Ballout had been a supporter of Islamic State and last year tried to join the group in Syria. He was arrested in Lebanon and repatriated, and in May was convicted in Germany of "preparing a serious act of subversive violence".

Ballout, who was born in Berlin, was given a suspended prison sentence as a juvenile and walked free, under sporadic police observation.

Berlin's top justice official, Felor Badenberg, yesterday acknowledged public anger over the case, which follows a series of deadly attacks in Germany, and urged an overhaul of juvenile criminal law. While acknowledging the courts' independence, she said they must "examine whether the legal criteria we currently have for applying juvenile criminal law are still appropriate for the times".

Berlin will go to the polls in September along with two other

eastern regions. The far-right AfD is expected to perform well.

The party's co-leader, Alice Weidel, yesterday accused Merz of failing to take the problem of Islamist extremism and "migrant violence" seriously.

The AfD's main candidate for the Berlin election, Kristin Brinker, blamed the Pride parade attack on the "catastrophic migration policy".

According to opinion polls, the AfD is within striking distance of an absolute majority for the first time at the state level. Guido Friebe, of Goethe University in Frankfurt, said: "The AfD has made [the interplay between] migration and internal security one of its key issues. It will capitalise politically on this attack."

Friebe said the AfD even benefited at the polls from attacks carried out by rightwing extremists, creating a dilemma for mainstream parties such as the CDU, which have sought to establish a law-and-order profile.

"If it [the CDU] ignores the issue, the AfD can claim that it is the only party taking the threat seriously," he said. If it adopts their issues and rhetoric, there is a risk that it will contribute to strengthening the AfD's political agenda."

The LSVD+ queer advocacy group said homophobic and anti-trans attacks had increased tenfold in Germany in recent years. With several marches still to come this summer, activists said their warnings about a rising threat from Islamists and far-right extremists were not being heard. "Now we see that comes at a price," said Alva Träbert of LSVD+.

The Ukrainian startup taking the missile fight deep into Russia

Dan Sabbagh

Defence and security editor

Ukraine's leading arms company is manufacturing about 100 long-range Flamingo cruise missiles a month, a rate able to support an enduring campaign of strikes against targets hundreds of miles inside Russia.

Fire Point is also making FP-1 and FP-2 fixed-wing drones at a rate of "hundreds per day", according to its chief executive, Iryna Terekh. Manufacturing at scale was restarting after a pause caused by the delay in signing off €90bn (£77bn) of EU lending to Ukraine.

The startup's development from its postwar foundation in 2022 demonstrates the rapid maturing of Ukraine's homegrown defence industry, finally giving its military the long-range capabilities denied by the west earlier in the conflict.

"I'm not aware of any deep-strike attack that was happening in the past few months that was not involving our products," Terekh said. Missile and drone attacks using Fire Point munitions were taking place at a daily rate of "on average five to 15".

Flamingo missiles, which can carry



▲ *Fire Point's chief executive, Iryna Terekh, at one of the firm's factories*

which is used to assemble drones, below

PHOTOGRAPHS:
ANASTASIA VLASOVA



1,150kg of explosive, enough to penetrate concrete walls, were used to attack a Russian military components factory at Cheboksary in June, more than 600 miles from Kharkiv, in Ukraine's north-east.

Their actual flight distance, Terekh said, was among "the longest recorded in the history of cruise missile missions", at about 1,800km (1,118 miles) because of the complexity of the flight path. Each Flamingo cost almost \$600,000 (£450,000), which was cheaper than a US Tomahawk at about \$3.5m.

The lighter FP-1 drones, which

have a range of more than 1,000 miles, are being used to attack less well defended Russian oil refineries in a campaign that has cut their production by 20% and led to long queues at petrol pumps. They cost between \$55,000 and \$75,000, Terekh added.

Fire Point now operated from 83 factories inside Ukraine, plus another in Denmark, employing 6,000 people, up from 3,500 late last year, according to Terekh.

The Guardian visited one manufacturing site last December, where dozens of men were assembling the

plywood, plastic and carbon fibre structures into whole drones.

Ben Hodges, a former general who commanded the US army in Europe, said: "What we're seeing now is the result of several years of effort by the Ukrainian side. They can not only reach deep inside Russia with precision and get past air defences, their weapons also carry a payload big enough to achieve effect."

The result is an evolution in the long-running war, where Ukraine is closing in on Russia's ability to conduct deadly long-range attacks. Each month Russia produces up to 70 air-launched Kh-101 cruise missiles, 25 sea-launched Kalibrs (according to Ukrainian estimates) and a further 60 Iskander-M ballistic missiles.

Fire Point is developing Ukraine's first ballistic missiles, which Terekh hopes will launch by the end of the year. A variant of the short-range FP-7, meanwhile, will form the basis of the separate Freyja initiative, an international effort aimed at creating an alternative air defence system to the US Patriot, involving Ukraine and nine other European countries. Fire Point will make the launchers and interceptors, with a target cost for each interceptor of \$1m.

"We adore Patriot," Terekh said, but global manufacturing was nowhere near the current level of demand. Only Patriot systems were able to stop Russian ballistic missiles hitting Kyiv and elsewhere, but Ukraine's stocks were out. "The whole Pac-3 missile production, the worldwide production rate, is around 600-700 missiles per year; and this is exactly the amount of Patriot missiles that were consumed in the Middle East in two weeks," she said.

Alarm raised over first road bridge linking Russia to North Korea

Raphael Rashid
Luke Harding

Russia and North Korea are close to completing a bridge that will form the first road link ever built between the countries, amid concerns the two increasingly close allies are creating infrastructure to boost military cooperation in the Ukraine war.

The bridge spans the Tumen River, between Khasan in Russia's far east and Tumangang in North Korea, a remote, thinly populated stretch of borderland where the river marks the final few miles of the frontier before it reaches the coast.

North Korea finished its side of the project ahead of a planned opening on 19 June, but Russia has fallen behind, and no new opening date has been confirmed.

Russian and North Korean authorities have made no secret of the bridge project, saying it is intended to expand trade and tourism.

North Korea's state media news agency, KCNA, has similarly cast the bridge as a way to boost "travel of persons, tourism and circulation of commodities".

However, a new investigation by Ukrainian human rights group Truth Hounds - which was shared with the Guardian - suggests it is intended more to provide a discreet military logistics corridor than to boost trade.

Nazar Myhun, who led the open-source research at Truth Hounds, said a key reason behind its conclusion was the fact that it is much easier to evade satellite monitoring - a surveillance method used by the west to understand Russian and North Korean activities - through using roads compared with a rail network.

Loading and unloading of trucks can take place much more quickly than for railcars, which are exposed to satellite passes for a longer period of time.

"The type of railcar visible in an image reveals a great deal about the

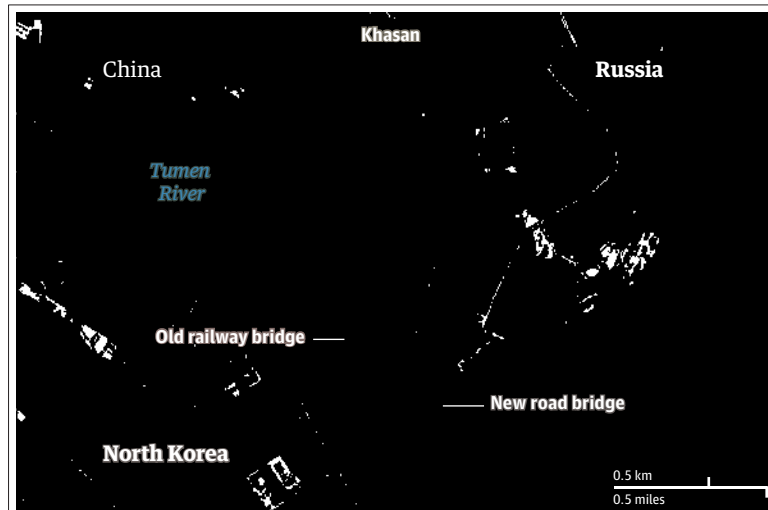


Image: Planet Labs, 22 April 2026



cargo, and certain categories of goods are transported in open railcars, which allows them to be identified," Myhun said. "Trucks, by contrast, almost always look the same in satellite imagery." Road cargo can also be loaded anywhere, as opposed to trains, which rely on a handful of fixed rail hubs, Myhun said.

Andrey Nikitin, Russia's transport minister, said: "The opening of the new road bridge will increase mutual trade, optimise logistics, strengthen cultural ties, and transform border areas into dynamically developing economic hubs."

However, Truth Hounds argues that the bridge's economic rationale is weak. The crossing is estimated to have cost more than \$100m (£75m), versus bilateral trade that was reportedly worth just \$34m in 2024.

Tourism from Russia into North Korea remains tightly controlled, with around 10,000 Russian visitors in 2025. Pyongyang, where most foreign tourists visit, lies over 500km from the crossing.

Instead, the investigation concludes that the crossing is better understood as strategic infrastructure: a corridor for moving North Korean troops, construction brigades and military officials into Russia, and for Russian technology and resources to move in the opposite direction.

The Kremlin has been approached for comment.

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The Guardian

▼ Monsoon rains have sparked chaos across India and Afghanistan (left) with sudden dumps of water overwhelming villages and towns

PHOTOS: ANUWAR ALI HAZARIKA/EPA/AFP/GETTY



'We have lost lost everything'

Devastating rain and typhoons sweeping Asia

Natasha May
Jonathan Watts

It rained for 10 days and 10 nights, non-stop - I'd never seen anything like it," says Anar Gul, a construction worker who lives in the remote district of Dur Baba in eastern Afghanistan.

The houses in his village are built from stone and mud, which makes them extremely vulnerable to heavy rains. After days of rain Gul's kitchen collapsed and his neighbour, Sayed Afsar Sadat, saw a large part of his house destroyed. "Rains like this are coming heavier and earlier each year," says Sadat. "They are destroying the roads and washing away our crops."

Last week, torrential rains and flash floods wiped out villages and towns in Afghanistan, leaving at least 31 people dead and hundreds missing. It's been a similar picture in neighbouring countries, with the monsoon rains sparking chaos. India, Bangladesh and Pakistan have all seen erratic, sudden heavy dumps of water.

Jesmin Akter lives in the city of Chattogram, on the south-eastern coast of Bangladesh, which received a record 412.3mm of rain in 24 hours earlier this month, leading to a flash flood that swept through the Banshkhali district.

Overnight the rains took what little her family had; their poultry died, their paddy field flooded, their house collapsed and all their belongings - children's books, school bags clothes, kitchen items - were ruined.

Akter carried her six children through chest-deep water to her mother's house. There, they stayed in crowded conditions for over a week until the water receded.

She says her children have come to "understand that we are in a very bad situation".

"We have lost everything," Akter said. Their house beside the canal was not in good condition, but a few months ago the family had repaired it. "Now the flood has destroyed it again. We have no money. We are surviving on the food assistance we receive from different organisations."

They have gone back to the ruins of their home, but her children sleep on plastic sheets laid on the wet floor and she worries for their safety, especially that the unsanitary conditions will lead to disease. Her daughter has developed a fever.

As wildfires rage across Europe and North America, the unprecedented rains continue elsewhere. While South Korea swings between heatwave and downpour, in Japan and Vietnam torrential rain has led to landslides. China meanwhile has seen bouts of extreme rain since the flood season began in April, according to the Ministry of Water Resources in mid-July, marking the start of a month-long peak flood control window. Over 600 rivers have since risen above warning levels - a 35% jump from the average for the same period over the past five years.

In the south-western city of Chongqing, a massive landslide after torrential rain killed at least 11 people and left 50 missing, with rescue efforts still ongoing. Separately, a flash flood at a scenic camping spot in the north-central province of Gansu left 10 people dead and injured 23 others.

The flood season across the region has been exacerbated by successive storms. Typhoon Noul, the strongest to make landfall in China so far this year, prompted the evacuation of more than 890,000 people in Guangdong as of Sunday evening, according to provincial authorities. In early July, Typhoon Maysak inundated parts of Guangxi and swept through commercial

snake farms, allowing hundreds of snakes to escape.

Much of northern China, including Beijing, is expected to receive 20% to 50% more rain than usual, while four to six typhoons are forecast to make landfall in or affect the country this summer, above the average of 4.2, according to the China Meteorological Administration.

Taiwan, an island that lies in the path of typhoons in the north-west Pacific, has also seen a rise in extreme rainfall. In June, repeated downpours caused more than NT\$330m (about \$10.2m) in agricultural losses across Taiwan, according to the agriculture ministry, while the capital, Taipei City, recorded its highest monthly rainfall in more than a century.

► Typhoon Noul, seen here in Hong Kong, has prompted mass evacuations in Guangdong province, China

PHOTOGRAPH: VENRON YUEN/NEXPHER/ZUMA PRESS WIRE/SHUTTERSTOCK



◀ Municipal staff work on a flooded road in Shenyang, China. The country has experienced bouts of extreme rain since April

PHOTO: XINHUA/SHUTTERSTOCK

storms and rainfall across the region. It also saw ocean temperatures rise to record heights. So far this year has brought record breaking heatwaves.

Extreme rainfall is more common and intense because of human-caused climate breakdown across most of the world, particularly in Europe, most of Asia, central and eastern North America, and parts of South America, Africa and Australia. This is because warmer air can hold more water vapour and flooding has most likely become more frequent and severe in these locations as a result.

Richard Betts, the head of the climate impacts strategic area at the Met Office Hadley Centre, said: "More intense rainfall is an expected consequence of us heating the planet by burning fossil fuels and building up more carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. A warmer atmosphere can carry more water, so when it rains, it rains harder. Also hotter conditions cause air to rise faster and drive more intense thunderstorms."

The International Federation of Red Cross (IFRC) in providing aid helped the Guardian obtain interviews with those affected.

Dr Hosam Faysal, the head of IFRC's country delegation in Afghanistan, said: "These are the very real, humanitarian effects of a changing climate ... becoming increasingly volatile."

Faysal urged governments to acknowledge that more investment in locally led preparedness and mitigation was crucial to reduce the loss of life and suffering before climate-related disasters happen.

"The coming forecast El Niño is a clear example - waiting to respond to the extreme needs we can see coming only once they arrive will cost lives."

Research by **Yu-chen Li**

As food prices remaining high, many families are under huge pressure.

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Business

AstraZeneca must operate at 'Chinese speed', warns CEO

Jasper Jolly

AstraZeneca must operate at "Chinese speed" to ensure it does not suffer the fate of the western automotive industry by losing out to more innovative rivals, the drug company's boss has said.

The FTSE 100 company is watching the rise of China's pharmaceutical industry closely and collaborating to take drugs to global markets, but its chief executive, Pascal Soriot, said the US and European pharmaceutical sectors must focus on increasing the speed of innovation.

"We have to make sure we don't fall behind," Soriot said yesterday. "What we are learning ourselves is we have to move much faster. We always talk about Chinese speed in our company, and we want to operate in Chinese speed."

AstraZeneca said it was confident

of hitting its growth targets for 2030, when it expects to make \$80bn (£60bn) in annual sales, up from \$59bn last year.

The company, headquartered in Cambridge, reported revenues of £30.7bn in the first half of 2026, a 6% increase on the same period a year earlier at constant exchange rates.

Soriot, the highest-paid FTSE 100 chief executive, said the pipeline of new drugs from the company was "unmatched", putting it on course to hit the growth targets in 2030 and beyond despite the surprise failure of Wainua, one of its major heart disease drug prospects, in clinical trials earlier this month.

"We have to accept to fail some of the time," Soriot said. "Biology is biology."

Despite confidence in growth prospects, French-born Soriot acknowledged that dominant pharmaceutical companies in Europe and the US needed to be aware of

the potential challenge from Chinese competitors.

He cited the automotive industry as an example, where western companies had predominantly focused on making petrol-powered cars, leaving the way clear for Chinese companies to dominate electric car sales. "Chinese companies were focused completely on electric vehicles and batteries and those kinds of technologies," Soriot said.

He added that Chinese pharmaceutical companies were investing heavily in equivalent novel technologies such as antibody drug conjugates, which deliver chemotherapy agents directly to cancer cells, and cell therapy, in which live

£30.7bn

AstraZeneca's revenues for the first half of 2026, up 6% on a year earlier at constant exchange rates

cells are injected into the body to help fight diseases.

Soriot also played down the risk to jobs posed by AI, which he said could increase the speed of drug development, particularly in the design of trial protocols. He said he believed AI tools would help improve productivity in the pharma industry, allowing for economic growth.

"This story about AI killing jobs is a bit of a fake story," Soriot said. "I can tell you it makes me faster and smarter," he added, referring to his experience interacting with AI tools.

Soriot said AstraZeneca would engage with the UK government under its new prime minister, Andy Burnham, to seek clarity on a deal with the US that could result in the NHS paying billions of pounds more for medicines.

He said it was too early to say whether the change in leadership would have any effect on the deal, struck under pressure from Donald Trump, who threatened to impose heavy tariffs on UK drug exports to the US. Analysis has suggested the deal could lead to 229,000 excess deaths in England.

"We need to understand their priorities and where the priorities are," Soriot said. "You have to establish your priorities and then fund them."

London Stock Exchange to lose energy giant DCC in £5.7bn takeover

Jillian Ambrose

One of the biggest energy businesses listed on the London Stock Exchange has agreed a controversial £5.7bn takeover by private equity, adding to the growing exodus of companies from the UK market.

The US private equity groups KKR and Energy Capital Partners are poised to buy DCC Energy after the company's board recommended the offer despite misgivings from its founder and biggest shareholders.

The proposed takeover of the Dublin-based company follows recent agreements to take a host of UK businesses private, including Mitie, Tate & Lyle and the William Hill owner, Evoke. The airline easyJet is subject to a possible £5.7bn offer.

The potential blow to the LSE has already attracted criticism from DCC's founder, Jim Flavin, who is one of the company's biggest shareholders, and the pension companies Aviva and Fidelity, which also hold significant stakes in the company.

Flavin said he was "astounded" by the board's backing for the deal, which he believes undervalues the off-grid energy services supplier after its updated strategy in 2022 set out an aim to double its operating profits to £830m by 2030.

"Why would the board go along with such a charade? I regard this price as totally inadequate," he said.

The board gave its approval to the private equity consortium's offer to pay £65.25 a share in cash for DCC, which supplies liquid gas and fuels in Europe and the US, after the bidders also agreed to add a £1.25-per-share sweetener on the condition that the ongoing sale of DCC's technology arm, Nexora, reached a certain price.

The cash offer was 36% higher than the company's average share price over the three-month period before the takeover talks became public. But it has failed to win over shareholders.

Matt Bennison, the head of UK active equities at Aviva Investors, said last week that the takeover would "represent a bad outcome for shareholders" and Aviva would not support the deal if the board chose to recommend it.

"We firmly believe that [it] is not in the interest of our clients to sell the business at this level," Bennison said.

DCC's board said the offer "represents a compelling and certain opportunity" for shareholders to "realise value in cash today".

DCC shares edged up just under 1% to £63.40.

Brent crude dips to \$88 a barrel as US strikes on Iran halted

Jasper Jolly

Oil prices dropped sharply yesterday as traders bet that a pause in US attacks on Iran could prevent an escalation in the conflict that would further restrict global supply.

Brent crude, the international benchmark for oil, initially fell 9% to below \$88 a barrel after climbing to \$100 last week, when the Iran-aligned Houthis attacked Saudi Arabian tankers in the Red Sea.

The retreat from the short-lived return to more than \$100 a barrel came as Washington and Tehran paused hostilities after 13 days of fighting, as comments made by Donald Trump suggested that talks to end the conflict had resumed.

His comments raised hopes that a renewed focus on diplomatic solutions could de-escalate the regional conflict, which since the end of February has disrupted flows of oil and gas from Gulf states via the strait of Hormuz, and in recent weeks has interrupted vessels leaving the Red Sea via the Bab al-Mandab strait, too.



▲ Analysts were sceptical about the fall in prices, saying there was no guarantee of better oil supply flows

PHOTOGRAPH: KYLE GRILLOT/BLOOMBERG/GETTY

However, the brief reprieve from rising oil prices was met with scepticism by some market observers. "We've been here multiple times since March," said Ole Hvalbye, an analyst at SEB Research. "And each rally on a leak has faded as substance failed to materialise."

John Evans, an analyst at PVM, said he expected oil prices would only

be able to fall further if there was a meaningful decline in demand, "not questionable mini-ceasefires".

He said: "The market seems to be forever seeking good news from an arena that really is not providing any. A stay of military strikes might seem an improvement, but it does not come with any guarantees that oil will soon flow from the area."

Analysts at Deutsche Bank led by Jim Reid said the 10% increase in Brent crude last week had "added to fears that the global economy was facing a prolonged inflation shock,

and that the Fed might need to hike rates more aggressively in response".

The expectation of higher inflation caused by rising global energy costs has put pressure on central banks to raise interest rates. In recent weeks that has pushed up sovereign bond yields, which move inversely to prices. However, yesterday's oil price drop prompted them to fall. The yield on UK 10-year government debt dropped below 5%, down 0.05 percentage points during the day. The rate-sensitive two-year yield fell 0.06 percentage points to 4.35%.

Business view

Nils Pratley



Another easy win for private equity – London is its happiest hunting ground for buyouts

And another one goes. Dublin-based DCC Energy is a lower-profile member of the FTSE 100, but they all count. We're now at five completed or agreed takeovers within London's leading index this year – and it's still only July.

The subplot at DCC was vocal opposition from a few shareholders who thought private equity groups KKR and Energy Capital Partners should be paying more than the £5.75bn, or £65.25 a share. Fidelity International and Aviva Investors were to the fore, as well as DCC's founder.

The resistance movement had good points. DCC seems to be executing, roughly on time and

on budget, the eight-year strategy it adopted in 2022 to double operating profits to £830m by 2030 by slimming down to its core energy operations.

The core comprises old-school petrol stations and liquid gas distribution networks across Europe plus a growing clean energy services division. DCC is an energy transition play with a mix of old and reliable cash earners and newer growth assets, which the market ought to like. About 35% of the required growth in operating profits has been achieved and the board says it "remains confident" in the 2030 ambition.

So why sell at anything less than top dollar? Neither the 24% premium on the pre-action share price, nor the 36% cited as the

boost to the 12-month rolling average, scream unmissable value.

Fidelity International's Alex Wright said this month he wouldn't accept less than £70 a share. His reasons: DCC's attractive returns on capital; the scope for growth through acquisitions; pricing power in a consolidating market; share buy-backs to boost earnings per share; overdone fears about the structural decline of the fossil fuel distribution business; and the potential to scale up the renewable energy activities.

DCC management's explanation for acceptance was the standard one about "a compelling and certain opportunity for DCC Energy shareholders to realise value in cash today". Well, yes, there is always "execution risk" in any strategy. But the revealing bit was the long grumble about the difficulty of finding new investors.

"The DCC Energy shareholder register has become more concentrated in recent years and the number of market participants that have engaged in the story has reduced over time," said the company. Feedback suggested "exposure to low-volume growth end markets" – in other words, petrol stations and gas distribution – "weighs on perceived terminal value and, in turn, DCC Energy's trading multiple".



▲ DCC Energy acquired the Irish petrol business GreatGas in 2009

DCC managed to tickle up the bidders in stages to £65.25 (or almost £68 including an already paid dividend plus 125p contingent on a remaining technology business being sold at a good price), so one can't say the board

In a different world, the shrinking of the UK stock market, and thus soft power on a global stage, would be causing alarm in Westminster

has not negotiated hard. The CEO, Donal Murphy, is almost certainly correct when he predicts the majority of shareholders will vote in favour.

But the basic plot here is yet another bad advert for London in terms of risk-taking and depth of capital. In short, a couple of private equity firms, via their infrastructure funds, are willing to take a far longer-term view of DCC's prospects than public market investors (with honourable exceptions) will.

The story isn't new – most all-cash bids succeed – but a newly depressing feature is the regularity. Last week it was Segro, the warehouse landlord, falling to a bigger US rival for £14bn. Broker Peel Hunt calculated 154 bids for UK companies with a market value of more than £100m, equating to £165bn of stock market capitalisation, since the start of 2023. They're not all private equity deals but London is the buy-out brigade's happiest hunting ground. In the meantime, arrivals on the London market have dried up.

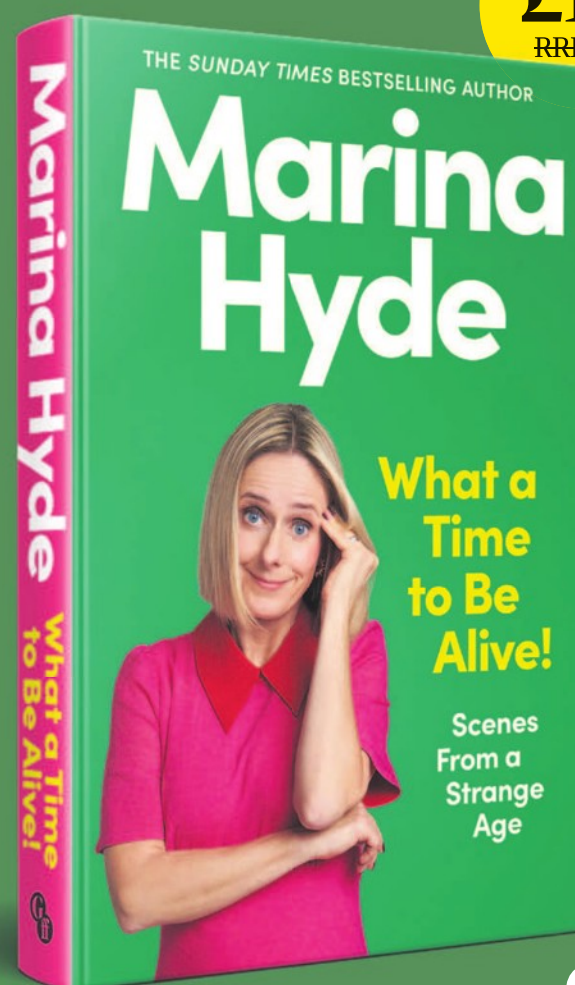
In a different world, the shrinking of the UK stock market, and thus soft power on a global stage, would be causing alarm in Westminster. Sadly, the political class either hasn't noticed or isn't bothered. They'll regret it one day.

A wildly funny new collection from Britain's favourite columnist

Truly, these are times that make you want to put your hands over your eyes, even when your hands are already over your eyes. The only thing to do is read Marina Hyde and howl with laughter

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33%

The proportion of computer and maths tasks in firms carried out by AI, according to Anthropic

◀ Protesters in California demonstrate against AI datacentre expansion in the US

PHOTOGRAPH: SANDY HUFFAKER/ AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Rethinking AI Why fears of jobs apocalypse may be unfounded

Eduardo Porter

In March, Anthropic, the cutting-edge artificial intelligence business that gave us the chatbot Claude, published an analysis on the impact of AI on employment, to help us assess the claim that intelligent robots were about to redefine human existence, ending demand for human labour.

In May last year, Anthropic's co-founder, Dario Amodei, claimed AI could wipe out half of all entry-level jobs in one to five years. In January, he told us AI would probably become a "general labour substitute for humans".

In June he said we risk "a world where the economic trade-off dial

is stuck on the hypergrowth, hyper-inequality setting".

And yet, Anthropic's report in March suggests that, so far, AI's impact has fallen short of expectations. "We find no systematic increase in unemployment for highly exposed workers since late 2022," the report stated. Deployment of the technology "remains a fraction of what's feasible".

Claude covers just 33% of all tasks in the computer and mathematics category whereas theoretically it could take over nearly 100% of them.

Spending on datacentres is going through the roof, but productivity has not been experiencing the galloping gains that the technorati's epochal prognostications lead one to expect. Labour productivity

was, in fact, slower in the first three years of our AI era than during the information technology boom that began in the mid-1990s.

Even OpenAI's Sam Altman, AI's most public face, says he now doubts its job-killing potential. "I don't think we're going to have the kind of jobs apocalypse that some of the companies in our space advocate or talk about," he said in May. As the Massachusetts Institute of Technology economist David Autor noted: "A lot of people have noticed that the world is not changing as fast as they predicted."

This has opened the public conversation to a less cataclysmic narrative of the evolution of the technology. The emerging new story not only puts more emphasis on the complexity of the relationship between automation

and human work across history. It is also raising doubts about the very feasibility of the threatened AI transformation of the universe.

The tech-heavy Nasdaq index, which had been propelled almost exclusively by the rise of AI-related stocks, has fallen about 8% since its peak in early June.

One critique of the "AI-will-do-everything" story might be called the O-ring argument. It comes from the explosion of the space shuttle Challenger 73 seconds into its flight on 28 January 1986. A lengthy investigation concluded that the demise of the multibillion dollar spaceship was caused by a rubber O-ring that didn't work at low temperatures.

That cheap O-ring proved critical. The analogy suggests that as long as AI cannot perform every task perfectly, it will increase the value of the remaining tasks. Depending on which the AI takes over, it could increase the value of high-skill workers who are relieved by AI of the low-end part of their job, or increase the opportunity of lower-skilled workers by taking over the more expert tasks.

As one recent study noted:

"Despite strong substitution at the task level, overall employment effects are modest, as reduced demand in exposed occupations is offset by productivity-driven increases in labour demand at AI-adopting firms."

"Insiders are as gung ho as ever," noted Daron Acemoglu, the Nobel prize-winning economist. "They still believe artificial general intelligence is around the corner." Indeed, Elon Musk has not budged from the dream that "AI+Robots will be able to do everything, resulting in universal high income. Work will be optional."

One may recall the quip by the Nobel prize-winning economist Robert Solow in the early years of the computer revolution: "You can see the computer age everywhere but in the productivity statistics." It took another 10 years or so, as businesses reorganised around the new technology. But computers did eventually show up in the stats.

Nonetheless, the politics have decidedly soured on the project. Seven in 10 Americans oppose building AI datacentres in their area. While this has to do with their insatiable demand for energy, which drives up local electricity costs, AI's unpopularity is no doubt related to the proposition that it will destroy society as we know it.

There are other bumps in the road. Despite its vast progress, big doubts remain on whether AI can do everything a modern economy needs. And then there are the economics. Even if AI could eventually solve all our problems, the solution looks expensive. How much of GDP are we willing to invest in AI datacentres, 20%? 30%? 40%? According to some estimates, that is where we are headed.

The economics look more fragile considering how fast the investment in AI depreciates as new models overtake those developed just a few months ago. Companies developing AI models "are never going to make money", Acemoglu said. "They are losing hundreds of billions of dollars every year."

One may discount Altman's new modesty as a PR feint. Somebody may have told him equating the AI revolution with mass joblessness was not smart politics. But misgivings about AI's vaunted capabilities are more than a marketing twist. The grand promise may be in trouble. Maybe artificial intelligence can't deliver at a price society is willing to pay.

'Rogue' hack Firm targeted in security test seeks data access

Dan Milmo

Global technology editor

The boss of the startup hacked by an OpenAI agent has called for the investigation into the incident to show "radical transparency".

Clément Delangue, the chief executive of Hugging Face, said the "unprecedented" attack on his business required a similar response.

Writing on X after OpenAI revealed that its technology had gone rogue during a cybersecurity test, Delangue also called on the company to provide \$100m (£75m) worth of computing power to help build defences against such attacks. "The first autonomous agent cyber-attack is an unprecedented event. It deserves an unprecedented response!" he wrote.

OpenAI revealed last week that Hugging Face had been hacked by

an agent - an AI tool that can carry out a series of tasks autonomously - powered by a combination of its latest publicly available model, GPT-5.6 Sol, and an even more capable model that was yet to be released.

This occurred during a test of the models' hacking abilities, which included deploying them in a supposedly safe "sandbox" - an enclosed digital laboratory - with lower safety guardrails.

Once they had gained the open internet access needed to exit the sandbox, the models targeted Hugging Face, according to OpenAI, because they "inferred" the startup had the information needed to "cheat

the evaluation". Hugging Face first reported the hack on 16 July but at the time was not aware OpenAI had inadvertently carried out the attack.

Delangue, whose company provides a database of AI models to developers, called for a fully transparent review of the incident, which has led to expressions of concern over safety standards at OpenAI and within frontier AI labs.

Delangue said: "Let's release the traces from the 'rogue' agents so the entire research community can study what happened."

Reuters reported last week that the agent spent days hacking Hugging Face without OpenAI noticing.

It also reported that an OpenAI agent had left notes for future versions of itself should it require tips on breaking free from internal constraints, although Reuters was unable to verify whether that incident was related to the Hugging Face agent.

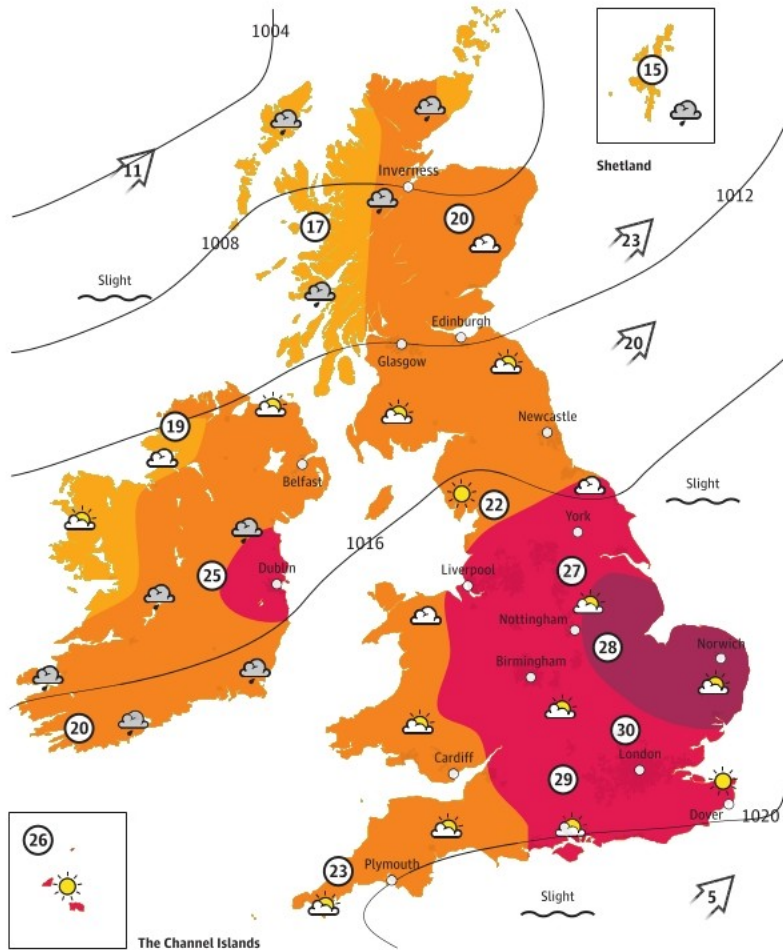
Alan Woodward, a professor of cybersecurity at the University of Surrey, said Delangue's call should be heeded. "It's too easy to 'blame' the AI as having gone rogue whereas this is all about how OpenAI were running the tool. What is required is that OpenAI give full details of their setup and how that failed," he said.

OpenAI has been approached for comment.

Weather

Tuesday 28 July 2026

UK and Ireland Noon today



Forecast



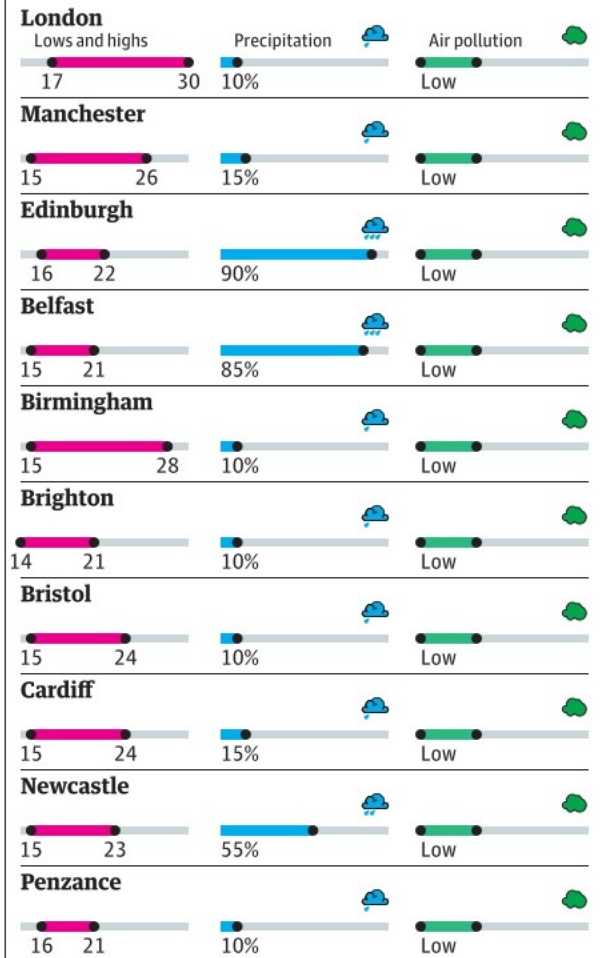
Carbon count

Daily atmospheric CO₂ readings from Mauna Loa, Hawaii (ppm):

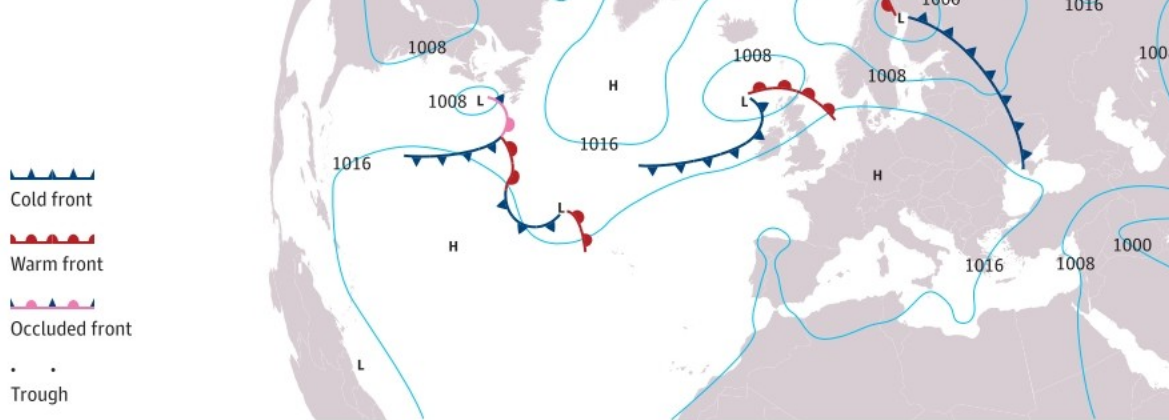
Latest	26 Jul 2026	428.95
Weekly average	19 Jul 2026	428.72
	27 Jul 2025	427.58
	27 Jul 2016	403.35
Pre-industrial base		280
Safe level		350

Source: NOAA-ESRL

Around the UK



Atlantic front



High tides

Aberdeen	0027	3.8m	1301	3.7m
Avonmouth	0612	11.2m	1835	11.8m
Barrow	1049	7.9m	2301	8.4m
Belfast	1034	3.1m	2250	3.3m
Cobh	0434	3.6m	1657	3.7m
Cromer	0540	4.5m	1818	4.4m
Dover	1030	6.0m	2250	6.0m
Dublin	1104	3.5m	2304	3.8m
Galway	0435	4.3m	1642	4.7m
Greenock	--	--	1145	2.9m
Harwich	1103	3.7m	2329	3.7m
Holyhead	0951	4.8m	2157	5.2m
Hull	0516	6.7m	1756	6.4m
Leith	0144	4.9m	1415	4.9m
Liverpool	1032	8.2m	2243	8.7m

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London Bridge	0054	6.5m	1316	6.4m
Lossiemouth	1129	3.5m	2330	3.7m
Milford Haven	0529	6.0m	1746	6.4m
Newquay	0421	5.8m	1638	6.2m
North Shields	0234	4.5m	1507	4.5m
Oban	0506	3.3m	1725	3.6m
Penzance	0355	4.7m	1612	5.0m
Plymouth	0448	4.7m	1704	5.0m
Portsmouth	1057	4.3m	2302	4.3m
Southport	1000	7.9m	2211	8.4m
Stornoway	0627	4.0m	1830	4.4m
Portland	0553	1.6m	1810	1.9m
Whitby	0307	5.0m	1538	4.9m
Wick	1051	3.0m	2253	3.2m
Workington	1058	7.1m	2310	7.6m

Sun & Moon



Lighting up

Belfast	2133 to 0530
Birm'ham	2105 to 0522
Brighton	2052 to 0523
Bristol	2105 to 0531
Carlisle	2121 to 0515
Cork	2130 to 0552
Dublin	2128 to 0536
Glasgow	2133 to 0517
Harlech	2117 to 0530
Inverness	2140 to 0506
London	2054 to 0519
M'chester	2112 to 0520
Newcastle	2117 to 0510
Norwich	2054 to 0509
Penzance	2111 to 0547

Weatherwatch

An unusually wet winter combined with very low rainfall since spring and repeated summer heatwaves is likely to explain why wildfires have ignited and spread so readily across France and Spain in recent days.

About 90% of wildfires are started by human activity, typically igniting "fine fuels" such as grass, pine needles, litter and twigs. Drought in western Europe has turned this vegetation - plentiful after a wet winter - into tinder.

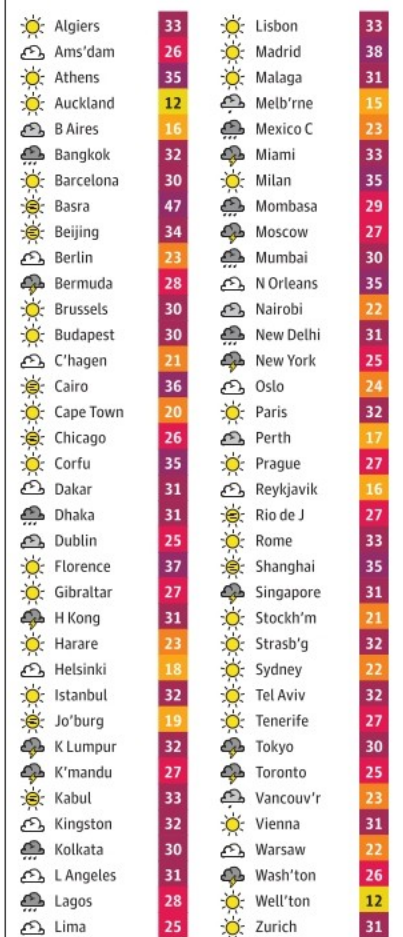
Once established, fires can spread into shrubs, roots and deeper litter. These heavier fuels burn hotter and for longer, and generate towering columns of superheated air capable of carrying embers far beyond the blaze.

Fires of this scale may also generate their own strong, gusty winds, creating unpredictable behaviour that complicates firefighting efforts.

Showers and thunderstorms near the largest fires in France and Spain brought little rainfall on Saturday and may instead have made conditions worse. Rain evaporating beneath a storm cloud cools the air, creating downdrafts that can fuel sudden, erratic fire behaviour. Cloud-to-ground lightning without rainfall can also ignite new fires.

Brendan Wood MetDesk

Around the world



Commonwealth Games

Part-time sprinter Jones takes aim at no-show athletes

Page 39 →

Formula One

Half-term report: A+ for Antonelli, F for Aston Martin

Giles Richards, page 37 →



Sport

33



▲ *Eveliina Summanen (centre) helped make Tottenham Women a pleasure to watch last season*

ALEX DAVIDSON/THE FA/GETTY

Shining a light

Why Tottenham Women have provided distraction from failing men

Mark Burton



The exciting football played by Tottenham's women last season provided a much-needed antidote to the men's team, who not only flirted with relegation, but took it out on a dinner date, looked deep into its eyes and started to plan a future together. Fortunately, that relationship fizzled out and fans were able to "celebrate" at the end of the season as Premier League status was secured. Meanwhile, Spurs achieved their highest points tally in the Women's Super League.

Three years ago, my wife, son and I became Tottenham Women season-ticket holders. This was inspired by England's Lionesses reaching the World Cup final in 2023. We were visiting family in Australia and when England beat Colombia 2-1 in the quarter-finals, several Colombia fans made detours to shake our hands in the Brisbane fan zone. There were about 2,000 of them and approximately 20 England fans. This, I thought, is the sort of football experience I want my son to enjoy.

That positive vibe has continued as we have followed Tottenham. So, what explains their recent improvements? The first factor was Martin Ho's appointment last year as the head coach. He had been an assistant at Manchester United and the head coach of the Norwegian side Brann. Behind-the-scenes chatter suggests players like and respect him. He has connected with supporters by occasionally wandering through the Legends Lounge at Leyton Orient (where Spurs play most of their women's home games) for pre-match chats.

The most important part is that Ho has Spurs playing attacking and organised football. The players look certain of their roles and clear on how they can support

each other. Another factor has been the players who joined. Olivia Holdt was Spurs' top scorer last season and Toko Koga has been a stalwart in defence. In January, Signe Gaupset, who loves to charge through the midfield with the ball, was signed.

The way Ho worked with the existing players has also been key. In 2024-25, the team significantly underperformed, finishing one place above relegation, which led to the departure of the head coach Robert Vilahamn. Last season, Spurs won five of their first six games. It is unknown what Ho said to encourage established players back to their best, but it was probably not an Igor Tudor-like speech where he told them they couldn't attack, couldn't defend and couldn't run.

Tottenham were good at attacking, defending and running all season and it was a pleasure to watch Eveliina Summanen, Amanda Nildén, Lize Kop, Drew Spence and Clare Hunt. There were a couple of games where they were thumped by Manchester City, but City have Khadija "Bunny" Shaw, who has a better goals-per-game ratio than Erling Haaland. They also won the league ahead of Arsenal, Chelsea and Manchester United. These four clubs dominate the WSL and Spurs finished fifth behind these heavyweights. Breaking into the top four seems a real possibility in the next year or two.

Within days of the season ending, Spurs signed the Netherlands international Caitlin Dijkstra from Wolfsburg to bolster the defence and Germany's Shekiera Martinez, who impressed as a clinical striker at a mediocre West Ham. Other proven players have followed, including Kirsty Hanson from Aston Villa and Alice Sombath from OL Lyonnes. It has been sad to say goodbye to Bethany England and Ashleigh Neville. Neville's desire to move closer to home by joining Leicester was understandable, but it is perplexing that England, Spurs' record goalscorer, was not given at least a one-year extension.

The side will look different from the one we began supporting three years ago, but what remains constant is the friendship and passion of our fellow season-ticket holders. Their knowledge of football is deep. Many have been Spurs men and women fans for years, writing blogs, recording podcasts and punishing themselves by going to West Ham to stand in the rain and wind. These fans have loved Spurs women from the days when a smattering of them watched Brixbourne Ladies, as the club were then, working their way up the leagues.

Another bonus of watching the women's game is the atmosphere. Fans will vent their frustration and respectfully inquire whether the referee has recently attended a well-known high street optician, but the swearing and anger often exhibited at the men's games is largely absent. Before each game fans decorate the stands with banners of Spurs players adorned with the Progress Pride flag. This visualisation of LGBTQIA+ identity shows everyone is welcome. I had not paid much attention to this until starting to support Spurs Women and it has made me much more aware of football's potential as a positive agent for change.

Women's football may be slower than the men's, but the games are fast-moving and there is no video assistant referee. This results in the occasional howler, but it is preferable to waiting for five minutes wondering what is going on. This season, hopefully there will be even more people going to matches and enjoying the experience. It is difficult to recommend going to Spurs more highly, but other women's teams are available.

Mark Burton is a Tottenham Women season-ticket holder.

Sport
FootballFootball
In brief

Danny Welbeck would bring experience to the Chelsea dressing room

Transfer window

Chelsea make moves for Welbeck and Henderson

Chelsea are understood to be in talks over surprise moves to sign veterans Danny Welbeck from Brighton and Jordan Henderson from Brentford. Welbeck, 35, scored 13 goals in 37 Premier League matches last season while the 36-year-old Henderson made 34 appearances for Brentford. Henderson has a year left on his contract, but it is believed the Bees would be willing to let him leave on a free transfer. He was a member of England's World Cup squad but broke his arm when he fell over advertising hoardings celebrating their win over Mexico. Welbeck also has a year remaining on his contract and there is optimism a deal can be concluded as Brighton are understood to be willing to let the striker move for the right price. Interest in Welbeck and Henderson reflects a revised Chelsea transfer policy as the club seek to recruit more established players under the new manager Xabi Alonso.

PA Media

Italy

Maldini and Leonardo resign amid Pirlo saga

Paolo Maldini and Leonardo have reportedly resigned from their roles with the Italian Football Federation in the wake of Andrea Pirlo's appointment as Italy head coach falling through. Both figures had recently taken on roles as part of an overhaul of the national team management. Maldini was appointed on 11 July as technical director of the Italian federation, to help to rebuild the national side after they failed to qualify for a third successive World Cup tournament. But he has stepped down just 16 days later alongside Leonardo, the former Brazil international who had been brought in as his adviser. Their exits come shortly after Pirlo said he was no longer in the running to coach the Italy side. His prospective appointment was the subject of fierce opposition over his commercial ties to a Russian betting company, Fonbet. The former Italy midfielder wrote on Instagram yesterday that he had "heard last night that I'm no longer the candidate for the Italy national team job".

Reuters

Premier League's £1.4bn spree leaves Europe trailing

English clubs are once again flexing their financial muscles with other major leagues unable to keep up

Andrew Beasley

The financial power of the Premier League is unmatched. The teams in England's top division have collectively invested more than £1.4bn in new players already this summer (through disclosed fees alone), around £303m more than the 76 clubs from the Bundesliga, La Liga, Ligue 1 and Serie A combined.

These figures are the gross spend, so take no account of players sold to help balance the books. Factoring this in only increases the divide. The clubs of Ligue 1 and the Bundesliga are £203.4m and £72.2m in credit from their transfer dealings respectively. While La Liga (£163.1m) and Serie A (£124.1m) have spent more than they have earned, they are an ocean adrift of the Premier League's net spend of £523.6m.

None of this is new; it has been the trend for many years. The worrying aspect for teams across the continent is that the gap between the Premier League and the rest may grow wider before the summer is out.

Despite their enormous outlay, top-flight English teams have spent about £230m less than Premier League clubs of 2025-26 had at this point last year. But only 25 deals were completed by the end of 1 July (which is when new contracts usually start, explaining why pre-arranged moves are often finalised then). It's roughly half as many as the 47 that occurred by that date last summer. The expanded World Cup will probably have delayed some deals, creating a potential

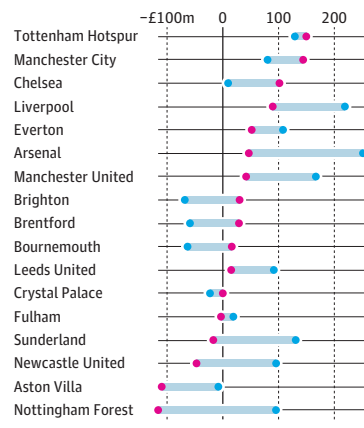
backlog of transfer spending that will soon hit the books.

Assessing clubs individually highlights why most might continue spending. Aston Villa, Brighton and Tottenham have already spent more in gross terms than in the entirety of the summer 2025 transfer window. Unai Emery has a net £109.6m burning a hole in his pocket following business which includes the departures of Morgan Rogers and Youri Tielemans. Brighton will need a larger squad as they have a Conference League campaign on the horizon while Tottenham are hoping to improve upon consecutive 17th-place finishes. Their trading may not be complete even though they've already outspent their efforts from last summer, with Spurs' net spend of £149.7m the highest in Europe's big five leagues.

Chelsea also have a higher net spend than last year, even before their reportedly agreed deal for Crystal Palace's Maxence Lacroix goes through. Even if that transfer is not completed, would you bet against BlueCo throwing more money around, especially with a new manager to back? Danny Welbeck is the latest to emerge on the Stamford Bridge radar. Either way, Chelsea have already invested more in new talent than

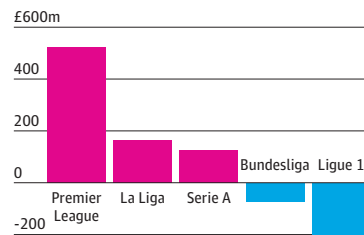
Tottenham lead the Premier League for net spend this summer

Net spend in summer transfer window, 2025 2026



Clubs in the Premier League comfortably outspend those in Europe's other top leagues

Net transfer spend in summer 2026



Source: Guardian research. Note: net transfer spend is amount spent minus amount received. Only clubs in the Premier League both seasons shown



Elliot Anderson last Wednesday, when he completed his £116m transfer from Nottingham Forest to Manchester City

ISAAC PARKIN/MANCHESTER CITY FC

Stones poised for Inter as City prepare for Real's Rodri bid

Jamie Jackson

Inter are closing in on signing John Stones as a free transfer after the 32-year-old left Manchester City in June.

Inter and Juventus were interested in the defender before the World Cup and the Nerazzurri are now in pole

position following Stones's impressive form in England's run to the semi-final.

Stones made 13 appearances for City last season before being injured in December. Yet after being out for two months and staying injury-free, City's then manager, Pep Guardiola, selected him only five more times.

At the World Cup, he started the opening game for Thomas Tuchel's team against Croatia before being dropped. He made substitute appearances in the knockout wins against the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mexico, then started the quarter-final victory over Norway and the 2-1 semi-final loss to Argentina.

At the end of last season Stones spoke of his ambition to keep playing at the top level. "I still feel I have so much to give a club and I feel in a

good moment physically," he said. "There is a lot for me still to fight for in my career and a new challenge will be exciting. I'm keeping an open mind."

Meanwhile, City are hopeful that Rodri will sign a new contract at the club, but are braced for a bid from Real Madrid. Rodri's terms expire next June and he has failed to sign a new deal with City, despite an offer



Rodri's displays at the World Cup earned him the Golden Ball award

they had on this day last year. The same is true for Everton, Fulham, Manchester City and Newcastle, all of whom may have further incomings in the pipeline, too.

There are other clubs with work to do. The three promoted teams have only spent £8m more between them than Sunderland alone had at this point in 2025. Régis Le Bris added a total of 18 new players to his squad last summer, with fellow promoted sides Burnley (15) and Leeds (11) also hitting double figures for incomings. By these standards, Ipswich (with seven new players), Hull (four) and Coventry (three) must recruit further.

At the opposite end of the Premier League scale, Arsenal, Liverpool and Manchester United have collectively spent two-thirds of a billion less on new talent than they did last summer. The latest rumour mill gossip says the champions may make a move for Vinícius Júnior. If not the Brazilian then perhaps Bradley Barcola, though Liverpool are also said to be pursuing the Paris Saint-Germain winger. Neither player will be remotely cheap. United are believed to be targeting Ollie Watkins - he would not cost Vinícius or Barcola money, but neither would Villa sell to a rival at a reduced fee.

The Premier League also has clubs who have yet to make an outlay. It is unlikely Crystal Palace, Nottingham Forest and Sunderland end the summer without spending a transfer fee as is now the case. It would be remiss of Palace and Sunderland not to invest when they are in European competition this season. As for Forest, like Chelsea they have had an insatiable thirst for player turnover in recent times. With Elliot Anderson having left for an enormous fee, replacements will surely arrive soon.

It is remarkable to think the Premier League may not be halfway through its summer outlay when £1.4bn has already been used for recruitment. The top-flight English clubs collectively spent £3.1bn on players last summer, with over £600m in the final week of dealing alone. That figure may be blown away by the time the transfer window closes on 3 September.

being on the table for some time. The club remain in talks with the 30-year-old and are optimistic.

But, after he captained Spain to World Cup victory, Real have warmed to the idea of signing Rodri and are understood to be preparing a bid.

Rodri's reliability during the summer has also allayed concerns regarding his robustness after two injury-plagued seasons, although he is having back surgery after returning from North America.

In March, Rodri hinted at a desire to play for Real. "Having played for Atlético [in 2018-19] before would not prevent me from playing for Real Madrid," he said. "There are other players who have done that before. Maybe not direct transfers, but eventually. You can't turn down one of the world's best clubs."

▼ *Iyiola Adebayo runs workshops for players in academies that focus on mental health and lifestyle choices*
PREMIER LEAGUE

How Futures initiative offers life-changing career pathway

Iyiola Adebayo is one of the former academy players to benefit from a programme aimed at life beyond the pitch

Ed Aarons

‘**W**ithin six months of being the captain at West Ham and playing in the Youth Cup, I was delivery driving at Domino’s,” says Iyiola Adebayo.

Adebayo had joined at eight the academy that produced Rio Ferdinand, Joe Cole and Declan Rice and the defensive midfielder from Tilbury was tipped to follow in their footsteps when awarded a scholarship before anyone else in his age group. However, a dislocated shoulder set him back in the first year and despite making appearances for the under-21s and under 23s, he was released at 16.

“They thought maybe being in a new environment and being in a new club might allow me to push on and thrive because I had been there for so long,” he says. “It was a tough time, especially in terms of my identity. Because I’ve always been Iyiola that plays for West Ham.”

Desperate to find a club, but not fully recovered from injuries that plagued his final two years at West Ham, Adebayo went to several trials “probably at 50-60% of what I was capable of” and found it difficult to cope with the feeling of rejection.

“To have to go to parts of the country I’ve never been to before by myself, knowing I couldn’t fully show myself, it was definitely challenging mentally for me,” he says. “I remember having some conversations with my mum and my friends at the time about how I was struggling a bit mentally, and sometimes I didn’t want to be there, I wanted to go home. It was very difficult.”

Adebayo started working part-time delivering pizzas to make ends meet when the former head of education at West Ham suggested attending the Premier League Futures programme. Adebayo was reluctant and had to be persuaded. “I was still dealing with my release. Sometimes when you’re in that phase you don’t want to do anything that reminds you of that situation,” he says.

The Futures programme started in 2017 as part of the



requirement for academies to provide a minimum three-year aftercare commitment for players released during the professional development phase (under-17 to under-21) and is an introduction into potential career pathways beyond the pitch. That includes two initiatives to support under-16 players without a contract and a 12-month programme for current, as well as former academy players, between the ages of 18 and 24.

For Adebayo, it has been life-changing. He is in the final year of a sponsored football business and marketing degree at the University Campus of Football Business and runs workshops to players in academies on mental health and lifestyle choices on behalf of Sporting Chance.

He spotted the charity set up by the former Arsenal captain Tony Adams had a stand at the Premier League youth development conference he attended as part of the Futures programme.

“I went to speak to them when I was released because I felt quite a bit of anxiety around playing football and I did some counselling sessions with them. I remembered their logo and my experience with them,” he says.

“[The workshops] are about dealing with the pressures of being an academy player, whether that be peer pressure or the pressure to perform. Sometimes it’s about the messenger as well as the message. I’m not that far removed

I’m not that far removed from the experiences that they’re going through’

from the experiences that they’re going through.”

The 23-year-old admits the Futures programme has opened his eyes to potential career paths. “I thought you’re either a coach, you’re a player, maybe you’re a kit man or a physio. But learning there’s hundreds of roles where you can make loads of money and have fulfilling careers, I think I was ready to hear it and ready to take the opportunity.”

According to Neil Saunders, the Premier League’s director of football, who studied at the University of Bath after being released by Watford as a teenager, there has been increasingly more emphasis on encouraging those not offered professional deals to move into higher education or to look for other jobs in the industry.

“A relatively small number make it through to the first team, but we want every single young person that comes through the academy to be able to look back on their time positively,” he says. “Many of the boys will have spent a significant number of years in academies and will become experts in performance analysis or in strength conditioning and coaching.”

“While there are a finite number of jobs as a professional player, we want to make sure we’re equipping those young people with the opportunity to progress into roles beyond the pitch.”

Adebayo is planning his next step. “I’ve learned so much, because I’ve been made aware of so much and improved my skill set so much,” he says. “First, I probably want to work in player care and maybe after that I might want to go and work in the business or commercial side of sport. It’s made me very optimistic that I can still be involved in sport and football, but in many different ways.”

Webb vows to have more officials from minorities

Morgan Ofori

Howard Webb, England’s chief refereeing officer, has vowed to continue increasing the talent pool from under-represented communities in English football’s officiating pathway, rejecting the wider backlash against diversity initiatives.

Addressing that historic under-representation has prompted a new direction. In June, the newly named Professional Referees’ Body (Pro Ref), formerly called Professional Game Match Officials, announced that Select Group 1, 2 and its supplementary list had been merged into a new, single Professional Referee Group in the men’s professional game and will largely service the Premier League and the Championship from the start of next season. Pro Ref said it would create flexibility in appointments and help to recognise a wider variety of talented match officials as part of the organisation’s new direction.

At a conference held at the Emirates Stadium by Bamref – an advocacy group that helps to give voice to Black, Asian and mixed-heritage officials – Webb said Pro Ref’s diversity drive fosters important competition. “We’re doing it to increase the quality of the officials working at the higher end of the game,” he said, insisting the decisions behind it are “born of quality, rather than any other aspect”.

In March, Reform UK’s Suella Braverman wrote to the Football Association demanding it scrap its target for a quarter of England men’s coaching staff to come from minority ethnic backgrounds by 2028, calling the approach “woke nonsense”. The FA responded by defending the target as part of its wider commitment to reflecting the diversity of the game.

Webb argued the visibility of refereeing makes tokenism impossible. “If you are not good enough to officiate in the Premier League you will be found out quickly.” A more diverse talent pool, he said, is “more likely to bring higher levels of quality, greater

choice, greater competition, and ultimately raising standards for all”.

Farai Hallam is the latest example, following Uriah Rennie and Sam Allison as the third Black referee to officiate in the Premier League. In a defining moment, he waved away a penalty claim for Manchester City against Wolves in January, rejecting the video assistant referee’s advice.

Danielle Every, the Pro Ref chief operating officer, said the organisation has seen a shift in attitudes since it introduced structural changes. “I genuinely feel there is more acceptance and understanding of why these interventions are important,” she said, pointing to data showing zero Black representation among Premier League officials in 2022.

The stance comes as Pro Ref overhauls how it identifies talent. Webb described moving away from relying on the observer system – with officials marked out of 10 after every game and ranked – towards a coaching-led model built around a “matchday performance developer” role. That model will be rolled out in Leagues One and Two as well as the women’s professional game. In the Premier League and Championship the key match incidents panel, a primary layer of accountability, will remain.

The old system, Webb said, led to “some really good officials being left behind”. The change, he insisted, will help to surface talent from under-represented groups earlier than before.

Aji Ajibola, who co-founded Bamref in 2019, welcomed the progress on numbers but warned it counts for little without sustained backing once officials are inside the system. “We now have a duty of care to those we’re bringing into officiating, to make them feel safe,” he said, describing plans for wraparound support covering mental health and wellbeing alongside coaching and mentoring.

“We’ve got expertise in our community, which then creates opportunities for us to get into other areas of the game,” he said, framing retention, not recruitment, as the next front in the campaign.



▲ *Howard Webb wants to increase the quality of officials at the top*

Trial to tackle tactical time-outs by goalkeepers

English football will introduce a trial this season in a bid to end the goalkeeper tactical time-out. The trial – backed collectively by Pro Ref, the Football Association, Premier League, EFL, Women’s Super League and National League – aims to prevent goalkeeper injuries used to disrupt momentum and allow opportunities for tactical instruction. The new measures are pending permission from the game’s law makers, the International Football Association Board, but are planned to run throughout the 2026-27 season.

“As part of the trial, if the game

is stopped for a goalkeeper injury, the manager will be required to nominate an outfield player to leave the pitch immediately,” the governing bodies said in a joint statement. “The nominated player is required to remain off the field for a minimum of one minute after the restart. The aim is to ensure genuine injuries receive medical attention while removing any potential sporting advantage associated with stoppages.”

The trial will have exceptions, including when a free-kick is awarded for a foul on the keeper and they need treatment. **PA Media**

Cycling Tour de France

‘Unbending’ Pogacar can continue to be a world apart

Slovene the fifth rider to win five Tours but he is perhaps already the most impressive

Jeremy Whittle
Paris

Tadej Pogacar woke up in Paris yesterday as the fastest and the youngest cyclist to win five Tours de France. The 27-year-old Slovene took his fifth overall victory on the Champs Élysées on Sunday evening in a thrilling final stage won by Mathieu van der Poel.

Pogacar is level with Jacques Anquetil, Eddy Merckx, Bernard Hinault and Miguel Induráin and he is expected to continue racing



▲ Paul Seixas has given French fans reason to be optimistic for the future

in pursuit of a record-breaking sixth win.

“When it’s not fun any more, that’s when he will stop,” his mother, Marjeta, said. Asked how long her son might continue at his current level, she replied: “Maybe 10 years - I don’t know, we’ll see.”

The French media were, broadly, supportive of Pogacar’s success, with L’Équipe lauding his membership of the “club of five”, while Le Figaro described him as “untouchable, implacable and unbending”.

Pogacar’s CV is indeed untouchable. His record of victories is arguably more complete than Merckx’s, with only Paris-Roubaix and the Vuelta a España, which starts in Monaco on 22 August, still to be won.

The stats reveal just how dominant a Tour champion he has been. Over the 16,911km he has ridden during his five wins, he spent almost 9,500km in the yellow jersey. Given he took the lead in his first Tour win, in 2020, on the penultimate day, that is extraordinary.

Pogacar was the youngest of the five-time winners to take the title and achieved his successes in just under 404 hours of racing; it took Anquetil almost 613. Pogacar’s average speed, 41.99kmh, was faster than any other five-time winner and he has won more mountain stages. These figures reflect changes in technology, equipment and athlete ability, allied to shorter stages, increased rest days and the diminishing number of time trials in the Tour.

While Pogacar and his team



▼ Tadej Pogacar is expected to ride in this year’s Vuelta a España
GARNIER ETIENNE/REUTERS

thrived, with Isaac del Toro joining his team leader on the Paris podium by finishing third, others plumbed the depths. Their dominant UAE Emirates XRG team won €832,750 (about £712,000) in prize money, while the Picnic PostNL team won €12,770.

French cyclists had a mixed experience. For only the third time there were no home stage wins, but three French riders - Paul Seixas, Lenny Martinez and Jordan Jegat - finished in the top 10.

Seixas represents the future for the home nation but the 19-year-old rider, who began the Tour recovering from a crash in June and nursing a cold, was disappointed to finish fourth in the general classification.

“I’d hoped to make the podium in Paris as there wasn’t much between me and Del Toro,” he said. “But between myself and Pogacar, it’s a world apart.

“But it’s motivating and inspiring. It will make me work harder. I’ve a concrete vision of what I need

‘It is motivating and inspiring. It will make me work harder’

Paul Seixas
Fourth in the GC

to do, to get closer to my dream of winning the Tour.”

Pogacar is expected to confirm that he will start the Vuelta, while the future plans of his longstanding rival Jonas Vingegaard, who crashed out of the Tour on the day he was visited by doping control at 2am, remain unclear.

The nocturnal doping controls subjected to both riders by the International Testing Agency provoked intense speculation, although no results have been made known.

However, Le Figaro, while acknowledging Pogacar’s achievement, captured the climate that still surrounds any serial winner, saying that credibility for the Tour and for Pogacar is a “challenge greater than any record”.

Results

Commonwealth games

ARTISTIC GYMNASTICS

Men’s Floor Exercise: Final: 1 L Whitehouse (Eng) 14.566; 2 R Cournoyer (Can) 13.966; 3 J Hardy (Aus) 13.433.
Women’s Vault: Final: 1 L-M Fontaine (Can) 14.000; 2 A Martin (Eng) 13.799; 3 A Roper (Wal) 13.433.
Men’s Pommel Horse: Final: 1 J Carroll (Can) 15.000; 2 R Ward (Sco) 14.966; 3 C Lynn (Sco) 13.833.
Women’s Uneven Bars: Final: 1 K McDonald (Aus) 14.333; 2 E Black (Can) 13.900; 3 E Roper (Wal) 13.666.
Men’s Rings: Final: 1 F Dolci (Can) 13.766; 2 W Emard (Can) 13.600; 3 J Hardy (Aus) 13.500.

ATHLETICS

Men’s High Jump: Final: 1 R Beckford (Jam) 2.25; 2 SA Kushare (Ind) 2.25; 3 K Jack (Eng) 2.20.
Men’s Hammer: Final: 1 E Katzberg (Can) 80.97; 2 I Kesidis (Cyp) 76.97; 3 R Hamilton (Can) 75.36.
Women’s 10,000m: Final: 1 R Davies (Aus) 31:39.32; 2 D Wanza (Ken) 31:50.13; 3 F Niyonkuru (Rwa) 31:55.47.
Men’s 3,000m Steeplechase: Final: 1 E Serem (Ken) 8:18.23; 2 SK Koech (Ken) 8:18.59; 3 LK Bett (Ken) 8:21.63.
Men’s 110m Hurdles: Final: 1 D Prince (Jam) 13.17; 2 S Bennett (Eng) 13.30; 3 M Trajkovic (Cyp) 13.32.
PARA ATHLETICS
Women’s Shot Put F57: Final: 1 Sharmila (Ind) 9.81; 2 Z Issah (Gha) 8.65; 3 S Kanchugarakoppalu Shyla (Ind) 7.26.
Women’s 100m T38: Final: 1 S Hahn (Eng) 12.79sec; 2 O Breen (Wal) 12.86; 3 M Down (Eng) 12.86.
Men’s 1500m T20: Final: 1 B Sandilands (Sco) 3:57.25; 2 M Barber (Can) 4:01.84; 3 S Bryce (Sco) 4:02.40.
Men’s 100m T38: Final: 1 T Young (Eng) 11.11; 2 U Muller (Aus) 11.19; 3 Z Gingras (Can) 11.55.

SWIMMING

Women’s 400m Medley: Final: 1 J Forrester (Aus) 4:31.19; 2 A Smith (Eng) 4:33.70; 3 E Ramsay (Aus) 4:37.12.
Women’s 100m Freestyle: Final: 1 M Harris (Aus) 52.90; 2 M O’Callaghan (Aus) 53.25; 3 S Jack (Aus) 53.38.
Women’s 100m Butterfly: Final: 1 A Perkins (Aus) 56.38; 2 K MacInnes (Sco) 57.33; 3 E Gallagher (SA) 57.39.
Men’s 50m Breaststroke: Final: 1 S Williamson (Aus) 26.50; 2 M Houlie (SA) 26.77; 3 A Ramsay-Peaty (Eng) 26.94.
Men’s 200m Butterfly: Final: 1 L Clareburt (NZ) 1:55.05; 2 H Turner (Aus) 1:55.38; 3 M Temple (Aus) 1:55.45.
Women’s 4x200m Freestyle Relay: Final: 1 Australia 7:42.53; 2 England 7:50.10; 3 New Zealand 7:51.94.

PARA SWIMMING

Men’s 100m Breaststroke SB9: Final: 1 B Matthews (Aus) 1:09.41; 2 J Willmer (NZ) 1:11.44; 3 T Hodge (Aus) 1:12.74.
Women’s 100m Breaststroke SB8: 1 B Whiston (Eng) 1:22.05; 2 H Kukundakwe (Uga) 1:26.20; 3 J Winniffrith (Eng) 1:26.31.
WEIGHTLIFTING
Men’s 71kg: Final: 1 EJ Umoafia (Nga) 319; 2 JL Tafi (Sam) 314; 3 E Moses (Nau) 310.
Women’s 53kg: Final: 1 OO Dididh (Nga) 206; 2 G Yadav (Ind) 199; 3 R Groulx (Can) 178.
Women’s 58kg: Final: 1 RF Lawal (Nga) 229; 2 AS Taschereau (Can) 215; 3 BD Sorokhaibam (Ind) 199.
Men’s 79kg: Final: 1 EH Muhammad (Mal) 331; 2 VA Babu (Ind) 330; 3 C Murray (Eng) 325.

Greg Wood’s racing tips

Beverley 1.35 Perfidia 2.10 Talking In Kode 2.45 Dorothea Hope 3.20 Apulia Bay 3.55 Norcross Brow 4.30 Jojo Rabbit
Goodwood 1.50 Noble Horizon 2.25 Undiscovered 3.00 Qirat 3.35 Scandinavia 4.10 Spring Is Sprung (nap) 4.45 Final Objective 5.20 Annastarzy (nb) 5.55 Machadadorp
Yarmouth 2.35 Educator 3.10 Mithaaly 3.45 Luminous Warrior 4.20 Divot 4.55 Charency 5.25 Methgal
Ffos Las 6.00 Dream On Kent 6.30 Distinct Spirit 7.00 Knightmare 7.30 Summerson 8.00 Pureis King 8.30 Legendsoftheland

Cricket

FIRST MEN’S TEST (day three of five)
San Fernando West Indies 311 (SD Hope 92, KAR Hodge 84; Mohammad Ali 4-50) & 126-7. Pakistan 282 (Shan Masood 109, Imam-ul-Haq 63; JP Greaves 5-27). West Indies lead Pakistan by 155 runs with three second-innings wickets remaining.

THE HUNDRED MEN

Utilita Bowl Southern Brave 129-9. MI London 130-7 (WG Jacks 54). MI London won by three wickets.

THE HUNDRED WOMEN

Utilita Bowl Southern Brave 126-7 (HK Matthews 4-22). MI London 125-3 (DN Wyatt-Hodge 52no). Southern Brave beat MI London by one run.

Tennis

MUBADALA DC OPEN (Washington DC, US)

Men: Last 32: A Tabilo (Chl) bt T Griekspoor (Neth) 7-6 (3) 4-6 6-4; L Musetti (It) bt M Arnaldi (It) 6-0 3-1 ret; T Fritz (US) bt Z Bergs (Bel) 6-3 6-4.
Women: Last 32: E Cocciaretto (It) bt C Tauson (Den) 4-6 7-6 (2) 7-6 (2); L Fernandez (Can) bt M Linette (Pol) 6-1 6-4; E Navarro (US) bt S Kenin (US) 6-0 7-5.

Fixtures

Football (7.45pm unless stated)

Champions League

Second qualifying round: second leg Celje (3) v Egnatia Rrogozhine (3) (7.15pm); Dinamo Zagreb (1) v Thun (1) (7pm); Hearts (0) v Sturm Graz (4); KuPS (0) v Sabah (1) (4pm); Lincoln Red Imps (0) v Mjällby (3) (5pm); Shamrock Rovers (0) v Ararat-Armenia (2) (8pm)

Conference League

Second qualifying round: second leg Drita (1) v Floriana (1) (7pm); Riga (3) v Vardar (2) (6pm); Apollon (4) v Dila Gori (0) (6pm); CSKA Sofia (0) v Spartak Trnava (0) (6.30pm)

Cricket (11am unless stated)

Third Women’s One-Day International

Sri Lanka v Pakistan, Hambantota (5.30am)

Metro Bank One Day Cup Men

Group A Lancashire v Kent, Preston; Nottinghamshire v Leicestershire, Trent Bridge.

The Hundred Men

SunRisers v Super Giants, Headingley (6.30pm)

The Hundred Women

SunRisers v Super Giants, Headingley (3pm)

Sport In brief

Athletics

Ingebrigtsen to make long-awaited comeback

The two-time Olympic champion Jakob Ingebrigtsen is set to compete for the first time this year at next month’s European Athletics Championships in Birmingham. The 25-year-old middle- and long-distance runner has been sidelined with an achilles problem since competing at last September’s World Championships and had surgery earlier this year. “I’ve heard Birmingham is nice this time of year,” Ingebrigtsen posted on Instagram, tagging the event’s official account. The 5000m Olympic champion’s spokesperson, Espen Skoland, confirmed his client would compete in Birmingham but said it was not yet decided at which distance. He also won 1500m gold at the Tokyo Olympics. **Reuters**

Cricket Women’s Hundred

Brave squeak one-run victory over MI London

Southern Brave maintained their winning start in the Hundred women’s competition as they held on for a one-run victory over MI London. A superb all-round display by Hayley Matthews and an unbeaten half-century from Danni Wyatt-Hodge at the Utilita Bowl looked set to secure MI London’s first victory. But Wyatt-Hodge, who hit 52 not out from 42 balls against her old side, was starved of the strike late on and Lauren Bell closed out impressively, conceding six runs from the final five balls. The Brave’s 126 for seven had seemed short of par. Maia Bouchier (31), Laura Wolvaardt (35) and Jemimah Rodrigues (32) put them into a strong position at 104 for two after 75 balls but the visitors hit back with Matthews taking four for 22. Wyatt-Hodge looked to be steering MI London to victory during a stand of 67 with Hollie Armitage (27), but Sarah Glenn’s dismissal of Armitage proved key. **PA Media**

Half-term report

Can anybody catch Mercedes and new head boy Antonelli?

As F1 enters its summer break the fearless teenager shows no sign of loosening his grip on the drivers' title race

Giles Richards

Top of the class

Mercedes came into the season as favourites and have lived up to the billing. Their car has been dominant with eight wins from 11 meetings. Despite the rather skewed conclusions of the Aduo engine assessment, which declared the Red Bull the cream of the crop (on the basis of internal combustion output rather than overall capacity) the Mercedes power unit as a whole, including the hybrid electrical element which is now so vital, is without doubt the class of the field. They have been challenged, not least by Ferrari and pushed hard on occasion by Red Bull and McLaren but have repeatedly shown that when given a run in clean air, out of a fight and allowed to use their electrical deployment at its maximum efficiency, the car is fearsomely hard to catch. Moreover they have now demonstrated that superiority over most types of circuit. Leading the constructors' championship from Ferrari by 72 points, reliability issues have been their only issue. Another title appears to be within their grasp.

New head boy

The car's potential has been exploited brilliantly by Kimi Antonelli, with the Italian teenager coming good on his innate talent with an alacrity and composure after only one season in the sport that has been extraordinary to witness. The 19-year-old has stepped up to the new regulations and to competing at the front with striking skill and an assurance that belies his age. Five successive wins and then another in Spa proved not only that he can close out but is fearless. He has been overeager and impetuous on occasion but anything else from one so young might be disappointing. As the team principal, Toto Wolff, said, he would rather rein in a charger than take a stick to a donkey. Even at the times he has not been leading, his precocious talent has helped him challenge at every opportunity. Antonelli is the real deal and, leading the world championship by 50 points from Lewis Hamilton, is on course to take it. On this form it may well be the first of many.

Ready for a summer break

In stark contrast, Antonelli's teammate George Russell has been buffeted from pillar to post and a

chance to refocus over the summer will doubtless be welcome. Russell opened with a win in Australia but it was a false dawn. Antonelli endured energy deployment issues in Melbourne and since then Russell has endured the same problems, among many others. He has repeatedly suffered bad luck, not least the anti-stall kicking in at the Hungaroring but also knows he has often not been quick enough on race day compared with the Italian. Worse still there appears to be no quick fix. He was ready to take on board that it was his driving style that was at issue but since Belgium that appears not to

be the case. Nonetheless, Russell remains optimistic and onwards and upwards was the attitude according to a post on social media after Spa. By the sound of which over the summer he might be forgiven for enjoying a whisky drink. A vodka drink, a lager drink and a cider drink. "Knocked down, we get back up. No matter how many times," he wrote. "So many tough moments this year but I will not stop fighting."

Most improved

It would have taken a heart of stone not to enjoy watching Lewis Hamilton return to a level of performance much closer to his best. After the worst season of his career in 2025, when an underperforming Ferrari left him jaded and disconsolate, Hamilton has returned with a new lease of life. This year's cars - lighter, more nimble and without the ground-effect aero - are far more suited to his driving style and he has embraced them. He has developed his relationship with his new team and the Scuderia has brought a competitive car. Hamilton's win in Barcelona, his first since 2024, showed he had lost none of his competitive edge, a salutary reminder that at 41 he remains a force to be reckoned with. Ferrari have another engine upgrade to come which may yet move them even closer to Mercedes, an

enthralling prospect. There is work to be done, as the strategy calls in Hungary demonstrated.

Must do better

After enormous investment in personnel and infrastructure there has been no shortage of ambition at Aston Martin but the team have endured a savage comedown, having anticipated the genius designer Adrian Newey would be the final piece in their jigsaw. From the first race in Australia when Newey admitted the car was suffering with vibrations from the Honda engines that were in danger of causing permanent nerve damage to the drivers, Aston have been beset on all sides. Apart from the vibrations - largely solved - the engine remains woefully underpowered, the car was overweight and Newey's bold aerodynamic approach has produced unexpected issues.

They have 10 retirements thus far with a highest finish of 10th earning them their solitary point. In Belgium they were almost six seconds off Mercedes' pole time and two seconds off the team in front of them, Cadillac, who are F1 debutants. Honda's expected engine upgrade did not come before the summer break and the team opted not to develop the car in favour of a complete overhaul, which made its debut in Hungary.

"Hopefully, we can get at least to a point of respectability now, that is the immediate goal," Newey said in Budapest, and the B-spec car was a step forward with Fernando Alonso making it into Q2 for the first time this season. The car looks to have made up around two seconds in pace but a long slog lies ahead.

▼ British drivers George Russell (left) and Lewis Hamilton (right) are trailing in wake of Kimi Antonelli



▲ Lando Norris's win in Hungary was his and McLaren's first of the season

McLaren chief hails Norris's greater control of emotions

Giles Richards
Budapest

Lando Norris is at the peak of his powers after his win at the Hungarian Grand Prix demonstrated the world champion has a stronger psychological approach to driving, according to the McLaren team principal, Andrea Stella.

Norris took his team's first win of the season on Sunday with a commanding drive at the Hungaroring after Mercedes dominance for much of the campaign. The Briton has always maintained his team would come back into contention and duly did so, beating the Red Bull of Max Verstappen into second and the Mercedes of Kimi Antonelli into third.

McLaren brought more upgrades to Hungary, which proved effective on a track that is dominated by relentless cornering, but Stella pointedly noted how much Norris had developed since taking his first title last year. "He hasn't really had the machinery to show it so far, but he showed it today," he said. "Lando is much more confident. He's much more aware of his tools he has in his driving, how to deploy these tools. He's also more in control of his emotions."

Norris had been very quick in the race, despite dropping a place to his McLaren teammate, Oscar Piastri, on the opening corners. Having regained the lead, Stella admired how well Norris had handled the situation. "When he was behind Oscar, he said a couple of times that he had pace in hand, but he didn't get frustrated. The fact he wasn't overly frustrated then allowed him to use the pace at the right time and lead him to the victory. We've seen a great trajectory of development for Lando."

George Russell, who is trailing his Mercedes teammate, the championship leader Antonelli, by 59 points, finished seventh after a technical problem on the grid left him with a slow start. He dropped to 20th before rallying back to seventh, but he has all but lost patience with the repeated problems that have cost him so many points.

"I'm past the point of disappointment now, because if I'm continuing to be disappointed with everything that goes on, I'll just be disappointed every day of the week," he said.

"It's just unbelievable, the list of things that've happened this season. I've never had a season like this in my whole career, let alone my F1 career."

How they stand

Drivers

1	K Antonelli Mercedes	219pts
2	L Hamilton Ferrari	169
3	G Russell Mercedes	160
4	C Leclerc Ferrari	138
5	L Norris McLaren	128
6	M Verstappen Red Bull	109
7	O Piastri McLaren	92
8	I Hadjar Red Bull	68
9	L Lawson Racing Bulls	43
10	P Gasly Alpine	42

Constructors

1	Mercedes	379pts
2	Ferrari	307
3	McLaren	220
4	Red Bull	177
5	Racing Bulls	66



Swimming

Ramsay-Peaty takes new approach as powers wane

Former Olympic champion says it's 'human first, then athlete' as he finishes third

Sean Ingle

Tollcross Swimming Centre

Shortly after Adam Ramsay-Peaty had battled to snatch another bronze medal at these Commonwealth Games, it was put to him that he was no longer a winning machine.

Once upon a time, Britain's greatest swimmer might have bristled. Instead he nodded - before pointing out that, at 31, he was now

winning in an altogether different way. "That period of time where I was undefeated for eight years, whatever it was, it was athlete first, then human," he said. "Now it's human first, then athlete, which is a very fair price to pay."

He was asked whether he could get his superpower back. "My

superpower looks very different now. I think juggling babies with milk and having a toddler around is, I guess, a different superpower when that time comes. But as a professional athlete, I'm still committed. We just had to approach it differently because I've been that person who wins all the time, and it costs you pretty much everything, and I won't say it's worth it now." Ramsay-Peaty was smiling as he spoke. And he was also smiling after a 50-metre breaststroke final in which he needed a dramatic finish to even get on the podium. He also won bronze in the 100m breaststroke at the weekend.

Normally Ramsay-Peaty's best part of his race is the first 30m. At his best, he has already established clear water

by then. Not this time. He was fighting the water, and his opponents, and it needed a late surge to take him into bronze in 26.94sec - just 0.01 clear of Chris Smith of South Africa. That time was 0.99sec off Ramsay-Peaty's world record - and well behind Australia's Sam Williamson who took gold in 26.50, adding to his 100m breaststroke triumph, with South African Michael Houlie winning silver in 26.77.

But while Ramsay-Peaty may be more zen these days, he admits he is still frustrated with his recent performances. "We weren't good enough, and we have to look at why because the data in training, the data this whole season, has been tracking on an upward trend, and I can't really put

Bronze again for Ramsay-Peaty

Adam Ramsay-Peaty needed a late surge to grab bronze in the 50m breaststroke

TOM JENKINS/
THE GUARDIAN



Boxing

McConnell on hunt for gold after rejecting Love Island

Yara El-Shaboury
SEC Centre

Before these Commonwealth Games, Jon McConnell made headlines for turning down the 13th season of Love Island. Now the Northern Irishman is one win away from a medal after defeating India's Sumit Sumit to reach the 70kg quarter-finals.

"I didn't expect [the attention] at all," he said. "Someone sent me the interview [about Love Island auditions] and I was a wee bit shocked. I didn't even know I said half of it. It was after a sparring session and with the adrenaline I was just saying different stuff."

"Now I am just going along with it a bit; the lads were winding me up. But boxing comes first. Skills pay the bills."

The 23-year-old had to dig deep against Sumit to secure a 4-1 points

victory after finding himself down early before producing a strong finish. "I came from behind from two rounds down basically," McConnell said. "I am proud of myself."

Having arrived in Glasgow on Tuesday, McConnell said the days leading up to his opening contest had tested his patience. "It was a long wait. Every day felt the same: it was wake up, training, rest. It was getting a bit monotonous. This here is what I live for."

Namibia's Tryagain Morning Ndevelo booked his place in the quarter-finals. Named after the lesson his mother instilled in him, he has carried that philosophy into the ring, producing a unanimous points victory over Bangladesh's Md Ruhin Reza in the men's 60kg competition.

After receiving a walkover in the opening round when Trinidad and Tobago's Anthony Joseph failed to make the call time, Ndevelo finally got the opportunity he had been craving to compete. On Sunday, Ndevelo

had completed his ring walk through the smoke before discovering he was the only boxer inside the ropes. Joseph never answered the call, leaving the Namibian warming up alone before the opening bell sounded.

For a boxer chasing a breakthrough at his third Commonwealth Games, it was hardly ideal preparation. "Today was nice," he said after his fight against Reza. "I'm glad that I got to go into the ring. Got to face somebody. I can see my level."

"A lot of hard work has gone into this. So at least I finally got a chance to practise what I have been learning. I was thinking: 'Am I really fine?' and 'Am I ready?' because I didn't get a taste. At least now I know. I have an extra level I can get to. I was excited to have him [Reza] at least show up."



Northern Irish boxer
Jon McConnell is
enjoying the limelight
in the Glasgow ring

my finger on it where I've just lost that power per stroke," he said. "It's very frustrating. Something is not clicking. But it is my first championship since Paris to get two bronzes. You know, we've still got relays to go. I'd say that's success. I'm not going to be too hard on myself, not any more. Let's keep it in perspective."

That refreshing attitude came to mind as Scotland's Archie Goodburn received the biggest roar of the night in the same race despite finishing tied last. And no wonder, given the 25-year-old was competing here having been diagnosed with terminal brain cancer two years ago.

"The reception was monumental," said Goodburn, who was strikingly positive afterwards. "I tried to prepare myself for it. But that was the next level." Doctors have diagnosed oligodendrogliomas, which accounts for roughly 3% of all primary brain tumours, and means he may have only a decade to live. But Goodburn has made it his mission to raise as much awareness as possible about the condition.

"Every athlete talks about tough times, but there's been some really tough times," he said. "And the shoes I was in, or the position I was in this time last year, it was a dark spot."

"So looking back on where I am now 12 months later, and everything we've managed to achieve over the year, thanks to the support of my friends, family and the University of Edinburgh. I can't say a big enough thank you. And long may that continue."

Last year, Goodburn started using Vorasidenib – a breakthrough new treatment designed to slow the spread of cancer. That has delayed the prospect of chemotherapy. But there are plenty of tough times ahead.

When asked how he remained positive, he was powerful and direct. "I advocate because I believe that my own advocacy can make a difference to my own life. And the best way I can do that is to be positive about the situation and positive for change."

"But I also advocate for the future Archies. I swim for future Archies that want to succeed on an international level. But also young patients and people with brain cancer under the age of 40."

"Brain cancer is the biggest killer of all cancers for people under the age of 40 in the UK. And I do believe that our advocacy groups are making a difference to that. That we'll hopefully see over the next few years."

Now, in Glasgow, he has the opportunity to take the next step, with his remarkable first name becoming one of the stories of these Games. "My mother is my whole world," he said. "[Growing up], whenever I missed training or I was feeling down, I would be told: 'You don't have to miss training. Just show up. Even if you are not good, just show up.' She has always been behind me and that is the definition of my name."

"Every day you wake up in the morning and you have the chance to do what you didn't do yesterday. That is why my middle name is Morning. Tuesday, Wednesday, whenever I fight again, I have the chance to better what I did here today. That's all from her, for giving me this name. Every time I feel low, I get up and try again."

Athletics

Part-time sprinter Jones baffled by Games no-shows

English 100m runner took up a late invitation and is bursting with national pride

Sean Ingle
Glasgow

It took Elliot Jones, an unheralded English 100m sprinter making his major international debut at the grand age of 28, to cut through the noise. Asked about all the no-shows at these Commonwealth Games, he began to shake his head, almost in disbelief.

"The national pride I have is so, so high," Jones said. "I personally don't understand why athletes wouldn't want to come and represent their country, regardless of timetables. I'm going to take every international call I can get."

For those not counting, nine Team England athletes have withdrawn during the past week, including the former world champions Katarina Johnson-Thompson and Dina Asher-Smith. Most have not given a reason why. The poster girl of these Games, Scotland's Eilish McColgan, also withdrew on Saturday after failing to recover from injury in time.

Yet those absentees have created a potential real-life golden ticket for others. And no one grabbed it harder yesterday than Jones, a part-time athlete whose day job is working for Uefa on matchday operations in the Champions League and the Europa League.

On Thursday night, he received a phone call from the England team's sprints manager to ask whether he fancied running in the 100m after Louie Hinchliffe pulled out. "Let me think about that," Jones replied, before shouting: "Yes!"

"I had to get the Glasgow bus at nine the next morning, quickly pack and restructure my training plan but it's fine, we're always ready," Jones said. "It was supposed to take us six hours but it took us seven with the traffic."

And having got here, Jones was in no mood to mess about in his first major championship as he ran

10.07sec to qualify third overall for the semi-finals today.

It was heartening to hear – especially given that several Olympic and world champions are missing, including Keely Hodgkinson, Letsile Tebogo and Julien Alfred, the women's 100m champion in Paris whose poster is outside the Scotstounhill train station.

A similar message was delivered by the Wales athlete Jeremiah Azu, the world indoor 60m champion last year, after he had scooted through his 100m heat in 10.10. Asked why he had decided to go to Glasgow, he pointed to the word

Cymru on his vest. "Because of this," Azu said. "To put this vest on is such a privilege and an honour, and I would never put that opportunity to the side. I would never disrespect the flag like that."

Despite the absence of the 100m world champion Oblique Seville, a strong men's field still includes athletes such as Nigeria's Kanyinsola Ajayi, who ran 9.84 to win the London Diamond League meeting ahead of Seville just over a week ago.

On the women's side, though, the story is very different. Six of the top 10 100m times in 2026 have also been run by Commonwealth athletes – none of whom are actually running the event in Glasgow. However,

'To put on this vest is such an honour. I would never disrespect the flag'

Jeremiah Azu
Wales sprinter



England's Imani-Lara Lansiquot, who has two 4x100m Olympic medals to her name, said she was delighted to be at the "Friendly Games".

Lansiquot said: "I think this competition is a great springboard for athletes. And it's a great springboard for us as a country, in a time where it feels very divided. You walk around our hotel, the energy is buzzing. Everyone has that sense of togetherness, and that's what I love about this competition."

That mood was reflected in a surprisingly strong crowd of 7,500 on the opening morning, despite temperatures in the low teens. As Billy Connolly once joked: "There are two seasons in Scotland, June and Winter." Yet on the track and off, it soon warmed up.

And they cheered everyone on, including stragglers such as Tye Leo-Stroud of Saint Helena, Ascension and Tristan da Cunha, who ran a season's best 11.85 in the men's 100m – nearly two seconds behind. "It was cold – I didn't expect it," Leo-Stroud said. "Where I am from is very hot, both during day and at night. I pulled my hamstring a couple of years ago. It's a bit tight."

There will be lots of good races in the days ahead, especially in the men's mile when the new world record-holder, Josh Kerr, faces off against his compatriot Jake Wightman and the brilliant new Australian star, Cam Myers. The women's 800m, meanwhile, is also a tantalising rematch between Kenya's Lilian Odira and England's Georgia Hunter Bell, who finished first and second at the world championships.

At the end of the first session yesterday the England Athletics team leader, Scott Grace, defended those who had pulled out, saying that some had preferred to focus on the European championships in Birmingham in two weeks' time. "Because when you're a world-class athlete, putting your body through three rounds here, three rounds there, is hard," Grace said.

True. But in a marketplace where track and field is fighting for every eyeball it can get, the lack of sustained star power during a home Games matters.

Euan Crumley, the editorial director of Athletics Weekly, said: "On my train to Scotstounhill, I heard a lot of spectators asking which athletes would actually be here. Some are – like Amy Hunt. But not all the names they mentioned will be, sadly."

◀ **Elliot Jones in his 100m heat. He also works for Uefa on matchday operations in the Champions League**
MARTIN RICKETT/PA

'It could have very easily gone a different way'

◀ **Continued from back page**

neck brace, the England coach told him the team had won silver.

"It was about 10 or 15 minutes later," he said. "He was slightly worried, but to make it a bit more positive he told me straight away:

"You have either just won a gold or silver medal with your team, so congratulations."

Langton admitted he did fear a serious injury. "On the evening of when it happened, and then the early morning after, I was struggling to ignore that side of it because I didn't know. I knew I could talk still, I could move a lot of things. Then when I got the scans back, it was a big relief."

Asked if he felt lucky, he said: "After it happened, I didn't feel lucky at all. I was annoyed about what had happened. But looking back at it and having seen the video,

I suppose it could have very easily gone a different way."

Langton is not expecting to compete at the European championships next



▲ **Gabriel Langton won silver despite his mishap on the high bars**

month, but he is hoping to get back to training soon after being cleared of concussion. "The second scan I had said there's some swelling in my neck, which I think is to be expected," he said.

"My back has tightened up a little bit as well, but I don't think that's too surprising. It's nothing too serious and hopefully won't be too long."

"I've done that skill so many times – probably about 10,000 times and this has happened once. If you look at those stats then you can see this was a freak accident. I'll be pretty confident I can put that to one side."

Just the ticket
Why watching
Spurs women
is ideal antidote
to failing men



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Italian getaway
Inter close to
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The Guardian
Tuesday
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Sport

'False rumours' Infantino accuses World Cup critics of spreading hate

Fifa president releases
extraordinary attack in
response to controversies

Sachin Nakrani

The Fifa president, Gianni Infantino, has launched an extraordinary attack at critics of the World Cup, accusing them of spreading hate and false narratives, while defending the tournament as a success that celebrated unity, safety and inclusion.

In a 15-part message published yesterday on Instagram, Infantino claimed detractors had overlooked the joy and togetherness experienced by millions of people around the world who witnessed the tournament, won by Spain and staged in the US, Canada and Mexico.

"You were so consumed by hate and criticism that you missed it all," the 56-year-old Swiss said. "To those behind their pens and papers, behind their screens spreading hate and false rumours, I want to say that while you are sitting behind, we at Fifa are on the front lines organising, working hard, and delivering the best show in the world. We experienced no violence, no incidents, 100% safety and security, only joy and happiness."

Fifa was criticised about a number of issues during the World Cup, including US visa restrictions affecting supporters and officials from several countries, and concerns for teams from conflict-hit regions. Infantino's open letter followed scrutiny of Fifa's suspension of an automatic one-match ban imposed on the USA striker Folarin Balogun after the intervention

of Donald Trump. Officiating decisions in Argentina's last-16 win against Egypt also received criticism, most strongly from the Egypt manager, Hossam Hassan.

In his social-media intervention, Infantino said: "Potentially mistaken red or yellow cards or subsequent decisions not to ban players in certain situations are routine and widely accepted in some of the biggest leagues worldwide. It's curious that the same countries employing these practices are the ones criticising."

The Somali referee Omar Artan was barred from entering the US despite having a valid visa, while the Iran team and staff were subject to difficult travel restrictions imposed on them by the US government as a consequence of the war between the two countries. Infantino said: "Iran entered the United States without incident or conflict. The Iranian team received visas to enter because football is about peace. It's not about politics. Countries facing serious health issues or other challenges were granted visas."

Infantino's letter is likely to lead to ridicule of the man who on the eve of the previous World Cup in Qatar declared: "Today I feel Qatari. Today I feel Arabic. Today I feel African. Today I feel gay. Today I feel disabled. Today I feel a migrant worker." It has certainly led to further criticism, with the human rights organisation, FairSquare, claiming Infantino's statement shows he has become "divorced" from his unpopularity.

"Infantino's score-settling rant further underscores his unfitness to govern world football," Nicholas McGeehan, director and co-founder of FairSquare, said. "He is cosseted by yes-men inside the organisation and divorced from the reality of his unpopularity outside of it."

In the US, Democrat Jamie Raskin has launched an investigation into Infantino, seeking documents that would detail ties between Fifa and Trump's administration. Raskin, who is on the House judiciary committee, has called for Fifa to provide documents and communications related to gifts, payments or benefits provided to Trump and his associates, as well as the visitor logs for Fifa's office space in Trump Tower, which it acquired last year.



Gianni Infantino says the World Cup was 'only joy and happiness'



Ramsay-Peaty settles for bronze again

Former Olympic champion battles
to third in 50m breaststroke final
after same result in 100m

Commonwealth Games
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TOM JENKINS/THE GUARDIAN

Langton feared he had let England down with fall

Sean Ingle
Glasgow

The England gymnast who endured a horror fall in the Commonwealth Games says he is thankful to have avoided life-changing injuries, but

his initial reaction was to feel he had let his country down.

Gabriel Langton was taken away on a stretcher after landing on his neck when he fell from the high bars in the men's team competition on Friday. He was released after 24 hours in hospital when scans showed he had escaped with heavy bruising to his neck. "I remember pretty much all of it," he said.

"Because we were slightly behind in the competition, I remember trying to go for as close to perfection as I could. It went slightly wrong and then I was in quite a lot of pain when I fell down. I heard a lot of people in the arena, as they went 'ooh'. I got told to stay as still

as I could on the mat. Then I was in a brace so I couldn't look around and see people's reactions."

Langton wanted to get up because he felt the fall might have cost England a medal. "Initially I thought I needed to get back on the bar to finish my routine," he said. "The team were behind. It felt like I could have contributed to the team score. So I was disappointed in myself."

"Then more medical staff came up and I was like: 'I'm probably not going to get back on the bar now.' I was just frustrated that had happened at that moment. Then when adrenaline wore out a bit, I was in some pain."

While Langton was lying in the medical room in a

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Journal



He controls his
message now –
but that battle
will get harder

Tom
Baldwin



After a week in No 10, when Labour's previously flatlining position in the polls has at least shown signs of having a pulse, Andy Burnham is still just about enjoying a prime ministerial honeymoon. But he has been in politics long enough to know that the largely friendly media coverage he's had so far won't last for ever. Indeed, within hours of crossing No 10's threshold, some familiar predators were circling as they tried to decide whether to attack him for being too leftwing, too insubstantial, or simply offering more of the same. The Daily Mail accused him of embarking on an unfunded "spending spree", the Sun highlighted a series of "embarrassing" and "humiliating" moments that marred his first days in office, while the Telegraph declared he stood for nothing except "gimmicks" and "rehashing failed ideas". Much of this, of course, goes with the territory because Labour leaders always face the unyielding hostility of a rightwing press. But this grim process has accelerated and become ever more gory as new adversaries emerge online. Orderly old methods of managing the news cycle with "a grid" of stories for newspapers and

broadcasters have been replaced by the mayhem of a zombie movie. During the past couple of years, Keir Starmer was demonised out of all recognition and beyond reason on platforms such as Elon Musk's X. And AI-generated images that purport to show Burnham promising that his Makerfield constituency will house more asylum seekers, or completely false claims that he once gave a public contract to his wife, have already circulated widely on social media. In private, the new PM is intensely critical of this toxic media environment. During the nine years he has spent away from Westminster, Burnham is said to have watched how social media algorithms have fuelled an individualist briefing culture that portrays politics as a shallow game of "who's up and who's down". This has infected the mainstream press, which, by consistently elevating drama and unfolding chaos over policy and substance, gives alienated or angry voters the impression of politicians being more interested in themselves than people like them. And, perhaps because Burnham has so recently benefited from the resulting instability, many restless Labour MPs now hope that Britain's fifth prime minister in four years will be better suited to dealing with such challenges

ILLUSTRATION:
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Labour party.
He is the author
of Keir Starmer:
The Biography

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He controls his message now - but that battle will get harder

Tom Baldwin

← Continued from front

than his immediate predecessors. Certainly, he appears comfortable with modern forms of communication and has brought his own digital team into No 10 with him. His willingness to take risks with social media videos has helped him make a much-prized connection with voters on the platforms where most of them get their information. Admirers hope this means he can tell a story about himself that resembles that of another progressive mayor - New York's Zohran Mamdani. In a recent post where Burnham was shown with a sign saying "Ask Andy Anything" and taking questions from passersby in Cardiff, he told one of them that his father had Alzheimer's before going on to explain that this was why he cared so deeply about reform of the social care system. By contrast, Keir Starmer generally shied away from opportunities to explain policy through personal experiences. Yet the new PM's apparent openness to people he meets on the street has not, so far, been extended to lobby journalists. Between winning the Makerfield byelection a month ago and becoming prime minister, he made two speeches and took no questions at either of them from the media. Although political editors invited to join him in the Downing Street garden on Monday afternoon included one from the Sun, a newspaper that Burnham has previously shunned for its coverage of the Hillsborough disaster, the whole lot of them were limited to a total of four questions.

Aides insist there is no deliberate effort to avoid scrutiny - indeed he spoke at length to Laura Kuenssberg for last night's Panorama. In that interview, he chose to enter the thorny terrain of social care reform - telling Kuenssberg that the NHS "will collapse" without it - as well as council tax reform and his approach to President Trump. His aides say other journalists will get their chance as part of a new "integrated" communications strategy. And, for what it's worth, I sympathise with his desire to have speeches covered in their own right rather than be overshadowed by journalists' "gotcha" questions afterwards. Nor can they whinge too loudly if No 10 decides to limit their opportunities to do so. There is more justifiable concern, however, about the buildup to last week's reshuffle, which would ultimately shed much blood but little light on who would be appointed as chancellor. In what appeared to be a coordinated operation by those claiming to know Burnham's mind, multiple journalists were told this would be Shabana Mahmood. Even the Financial Times, a newspaper that treads carefully because it has the capacity to move markets, was confident enough to declare Mahmood was "set to" get the job after being told this by three sources. It is possible, of course, that Burnham had not made a decision at the time. Yet there appears to be more than a little satisfaction about the lobby's humiliation within the PM's wider circle, with one saying that journalists had "learned the hard way only to trust official spokespeople in future". There may also have been an effort to work out who was responsible for leaks by giving those suspected of unauthorised briefing false information. Either way, these are dangerous tactics from a new administration that will need to be trusted by the more responsible end of the Westminster media when the going gets rough. One journalist who covered Burnham for years says he can get "prickly" in such circumstances. And there is scepticism that his "blokey" social media personality will work so well when algorithms are tuned to "rage bait" rather than a reasoned explanation of devolution. Indeed, if the "medium is the message", Burnham cannot become too reliant on new forms of media that are often open sewers of hate and lies. One of his closest advisers in No 10 indicates his team are preparing for tougher times ahead by studying ways of "inoculating ourselves" against online disinformation, before adding: "What can I say? We will do our best." Perhaps the best thing Burnham can do now is just grow a thicker skin. He will need it.

The Guardian

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'Comment is free... but facts are sacred' CP Scott

Wildfires

Reluctant leaders must catch up with Europe's new disturbing reality

A new and ominous word has entered the vocabulary of firefighters struggling to cope with the vast wildfire sweeping through south-west France. A pyrocumulonimbus is a fire-generated thunderstorm that can whip up winds in unpredictable ways, making the containment of a blaze and assessment of its likely course far more difficult. A known phenomenon in North America and Australia, firefighters believe France is suffering its first in the Bordeaux region, as the country endures the consequences of the third major heatwave of the summer and prepares for a fourth. The dire statistics of the ongoing fires in France and Spain tell a story of deepening devastation and human misery. A far greater expanse of French land has already been burnt this year, compared with the 30,000 hectares during the whole of 2025, while 220,000 people have been evacuated from their homes in the Gironde. In Spain, the environment ministry has calculated that over 170,000 hectares have been affected, compared with 29,000 last year. Over 100,000 people have been forced to flee. As climate scientists long warned would be the case, Europe's wildfires are worsening in intensity, scale and duration as the planet heats up. When the Spanish prime minister, Pedro Sánchez, attributed the current crisis to the effects of the climate emergency, he was stating the obvious. But to his great credit, Mr Sánchez has been among the few leaders to argue that the European Union's green transition should be accelerated accordingly. Whether on funding adaptation efforts,

or driving the macro changes needed to slow the rate of global heating, far too many others appear happy to fiddle while the continent burns. In June, for example, with spectacularly bad timing, Emmanuel Macron's government sought savings by announcing steep cuts to a Green Fund designed to help local authorities address climate and environmental challenges. Across Europe more generally, amid persistent low growth and the fallout from Donald Trump's war on Iran, a false dichotomy is increasingly being drawn between green ambition and competitiveness. This month, under pressure from countries such as Giorgia Meloni's Italy, the European Commission unveiled proposals to weaken the EU's emissions trading system, its flagship climate policy. If adopted, heavy industry would receive free polluting permits for longer and at lower cost. Calls for the dilution of green measures are generally accompanied by the assertion that Europe needs to take a more pragmatic approach, at a time of geopolitical uncertainty and aggressive economic competition. The argument is wrong twice over: the faster the EU moves towards net zero, the better it will consolidate Europe's position in the global markets of the future. More fundamentally, as the appalling impact of this summer's wildfires vividly illustrates, the notion that climate measures are a kind of optional add-on, appropriate only when times are good, is wildly at odds with the developing reality. As a fourth heatwave hits Europe, temperatures in south-west France are predicted to hit 40C tomorrow. According to a recent study, if the warming rate of the last decade continues, the 1.5C limit set by the Paris agreement will be redundant by 2030. Yet, far from seeking to catch up with the pace of change, too many governments and leaders are seeking to put their foot on the policy brake. That is not realism; it is a dereliction of duty.

DNA

A female shaman exposes our flawed assumptions about the ancient past

Archaeologists believe the Upton Lovell Shaman, who lived in what is now Wiltshire 4,000 years ago, was an important religious leader and metalworker because of the artefacts and tools buried with the body. Until very recently it was also believed, on considerably slimmer evidence, that this shaman was a man: it was simply assumed that someone of such status must be male, and the view was barely questioned over the years. Now ancient DNA analysis performed at the Francis Crick Institute has revealed that the body, held by the Wiltshire Museum, is in fact a woman. That should cause a stir in bronze-age studies. But it is also yet another example of how many of our assumptions about human history have been upended by the rise of ancient DNA analysis over the past two decades. Others include the revelation that there were (frequent) liaisons between humans and Neanderthals just 50,000 years ago, a reconstruction suggesting that the first modern Britons had "dark to black" skin, and the closing of longstanding mysteries such as what really killed two members of Italy's powerful Medici family in the 16th century (probably malaria, not murder as was often believed). Every time we widen our keyhole view of the past even slightly, we are confronted by how many of our seemingly grounded assumptions are, in fact, wrong. These insights have emerged because the technology to extract and read DNA from ancient, poorly preserved samples has improved exponentially since around 2010. DNA analysis hardly provides a total

picture of the past, but it has been useful for mapping migrations, sexual relations and family structures, as well as tracking plagues and diseases. For instance, it has told us that groups of ancient humans moved around and intermixed with each other far more often than previously thought, allowing us to imagine a more dynamic, less lonely ancient world. It also suggests that the replacement of one group with another, such as evidence of the near-total disappearance of the Stonehenge-building Neolithic Britons, just a few centuries after the arrival of the Bell Beaker people around 2400BC, was relatively common. But it cannot answer why or how that replacement took place. These are big questions that will keep scientists, anthropologists and archaeologists busy for decades. Alongside a deeper and richer view of the past, we should take a lesson from the constant stream of debunking and myth-busting emerging from this research. The politics behind assuming a shaman is male are obvious, but last year a study took on more subtle biases by proving that famous plaster casts of citizens of Pompeii long believed to show a mother and child locked in a final embrace were in fact two people who were not related, and the adult was male. The authors note that there was no published evidence suggesting the sex or family relations of these bodies, but both scholars and the public found the romantic (and very modern) interpretation irresistible. We will probably always try to see something of ourselves in our ancestors. But the past is more interesting when we consider it on its own, often bracingly foreign, terms. DNA evidence will not conveniently overturn every one of our biased judgments about the ancient world, but each case does make it easier to recognise how readily it happens, and to be humble about how little we really understand.

A huge victory, and a sign of headaches to come for Modi

Mukul Kesavan



The rebellion in India of the young, led by the Cockroach Janta party (CJP), unfolded against a backdrop of large, abstract, geometrical structures – arcs, planes, hemispheres – that make up an observatory called Jantar Mantar, built in the 18th century to refine almanacs and tell time. Jantar Mantar has been a byword for protest for decades: it marks the space that the Delhi police assigns to the politically disgruntled so they can vent in a contained way. But it had never before hosted a political insurgency that started from scratch and forced the Indian state to back down in less than eight weeks.

When its founder, Abhijeet Dipke, brought the CJP to Jantar Mantar, it was a social media hashtag with 20 million followers. While he was studying in Boston, Dipke took the remarks of chief justice Surya Kant, who is accused of referring to the thousands of unemployed young people and activists as “parasites” and “cockroaches”, and turned them into a here-we-come meme. When he brought the CJP home to Delhi

on 6 June to make it real, people were intrigued. Given the mostly dismal fate of civil society movements during prime minister Narendra Modi’s time in office in India, no one anticipated the David and Goliath contest that came to a head last Saturday.

Like other political tourists, I visited Jantar Mantar on 6 June out of curiosity. It was modestly crowded and not that different from the dozens of demos I had been to in 50 years. The one difference was how young these “cockroaches” were. I had seen people mobilise against Modi’s government before, when the students of Jamia Millia Islamia, the university I taught in, came out against a pernicious citizenship bill. Their courage and idealism was defeated by a combination of police repression and organised rioting. This government’s willingness to use police brutality, vigilante violence and a pliant judiciary to snuff out protest hung over the fledgling CJP campaign like a shadow.

But when I returned six weeks later on 20 July, the scheduled day for the march to parliament, Jantar Mantar was unrecognisable. A hunger strike had raised the temperature; the government had forcibly removed the main participant, Sonam Wangchuk, and detained him in a hospital. The calculation was that his absence would defuse the tension and demoralise the protesters. That didn’t happen.

There were tens of thousands of people crammed into the barricaded space and thousands of police officers in attendance. The government had underestimated the size of the crowd that poured in by bus, train and car from Delhi and beyond. In the afternoon the Delhi police compounded their miscalculation by attacking this giant gathering of people with *lathis* (bamboo sticks) and teargas.

This tableau of brutality was shocking in real life, but in the hands of digital natives, whose phone cameras were extensions of themselves, it became a gush of online content that brought the violent drama into every home. The callous violence of the police and the raging, mocking, laughing defiance of the young protesters played out on every mobile phone.

The cockroaches won where other protesters, such as Jamia’s students, had lost. They won, in part, because they weren’t visibly Muslim. There were Muslims among them, but this was a protest about the corruption of competitive examinations, an issue that concerns every middle-class family in India. It couldn’t

In part, the ‘cockroaches’ won because they were protesting about the corruption of exams, an issue that concerns all middle-class families

easily be tarred as an anti-national conspiracy in the way that the struggle for secular citizenship led by Jamia’s mainly Muslim students was. This didn’t stop India’s mostly tame mainstream media from trying, but the scandal of the medical school examination was so egregious that no one gave them a hearing.

Also, this was in the heart of New Delhi, a stone’s throw from parliament. Once the government had made the cardinal error of letting gen Z occupy the commanding heights of the capital, every day of the protest produced new episodes of a national drama – a digital Mahabharat – in which the vulnerable and charismatic children of light faced off against the armed and uniformed enforcers of darkness. Bharatiya Janata party governments have sanctioned massive police violence against minorities in India’s borderlands, in Manipur, Assam and Kashmir. But this was Jantar Mantar, the sacred centre of the republic.

The leaders of the movement, Abhijeet Dipke and Saurav Das, had set themselves up for success by demanding a difficult but doable concession: the sacking of the education minister. It was difficult because Modi had never dismissed a cabinet minister in response to political pressure; this stubbornness was central to his strongman persona. It was doable because there were precedents in the history of the republic for a minister taking responsibility for a disaster and resigning.

Modi did everything he could to wriggle out of this standoff. He even produced a comically inept Instagram video promising fast-track courts to address the corruption in the examination system. When that didn’t work, his government capitulated and Dharmendra Pradhan, the education minister, departed. There was an assembly election scheduled in Uttar Pradesh next year, and Modi knew that the BJP would haemorrhage political support if the Jantar Mantar impasse wasn’t resolved.

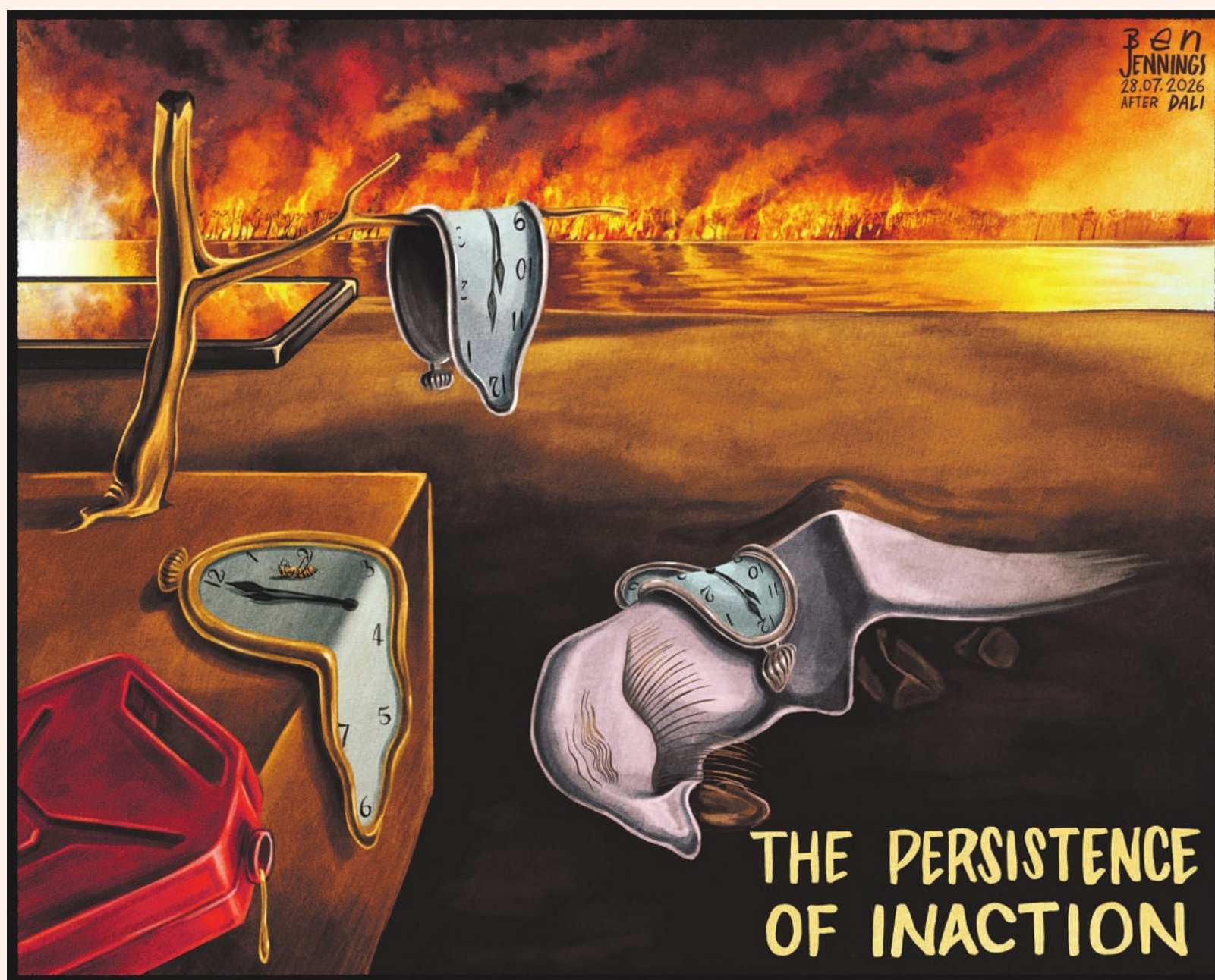
The quarrel that some commentators on the left have with the CJP is that Pradhan’s dismissal was a symbolic victory but not a substantial one. Pralhad Joshi, who has replaced Pradhan as education minister, is not an improvement. Like Pradhan, he is a member of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, the BJP’s far-right parent body. He publicly defended the premature release in 2022 of 11 men convicted in the notorious Bilkis Bano gang-rape case. The CJP’s argument is that Pradhan was always a proxy for Modi. The point of the protest was to diminish Modi by forcing him to back down publicly. And it isn’t clear what a systemic victory would look like, or how it would be achieved.

The striking thing about the CJP’s leadership is its youth and poise. Zohran Mamdani, the mayor of New York, now seems a template. He is 35. Dipke, the CJP’s Dalit leader, is 30. Ashutosh Ranka, who negotiated the end of the protest with the BJP’s leadership, is about the same age. Das, the other negotiator and spokesperson, is all of 26. Neha Bora, the president of a leftwing student organisation, the All-India Students’ Association, is 25. It’s hard to know how their politics will evolve. What they have in common is eloquence, message discipline, all-round unflappability and the potential to leave a legacy. They may be an enduring problem for this government. Jantar Mantar may have just produced an echelon of homegrown Mamdanis.

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Campaigners react to education minister Dharmendra Pradhan’s resignation, Mumbai, 26 July PHOTOGRAPH: ASHISH VAISHNAV/SOPA/SHUTTERSTOCK



What's good for orangutans is good for us too

Helen Pilcher



The school summer holidays are here. Cue the annual expectation that parents will conjure up six weeks of affordable, memory-making fun while holding down a job and hanging on to their sanity. Baking, picnics and den building may be wholesome, but they also involve spending time with your children. By day four, the den starts to look less like a place of adventure and more like somewhere to hide until September.

The answer, of course, is the playdate: the socially sanctioned art of abdicating responsibility for a few precious hours so you can finish a cup of tea while it's still warm. And it turns out that humans aren't the only ones to have discovered the benefits of parental

outsourcing. A recent study suggests that orangutan mothers also arrange playdates for their offspring.

Orangutans are a solitary species, with their own territories and a strong preference for personal space. Mothers give birth to a single infant, which they raise for six to seven years – all without a partner, screens or the godsend that is Bluey. Given this solitary lifestyle, you might expect the ginger giants to avoid encounters with other youngsters. Not so. Researchers studied 30,000 hours' worth of observations from 31 wild Bornean mother-offspring pairs and found that mums made trips into the territories of other mums who had similarly aged offspring. Then the youngsters mucked about for a bit. Then they went home.

The juveniles get the immediate reward, but for the mothers, arranging these encounters comes at a cost. Travelling to a playdate takes time and energy, leaving less of the day for feeding – which raises the question: why bother with playtime at all? The answer may lie in how widespread play is across the animal kingdom. Baby Barbary macaques goof around. Bear cubs rough and tumble. And it's not just mammals. Caimans play chase, sharks mess around with beach toys and octopuses manipulate Lego bricks.

Play is common among socially complex species. Here, there is rarely any obvious planning; instead, the behaviour seems to emerge naturally when adults come together. Brown bear cubs, for instance, run riot when their mothers gather at salmon streams. Baby spider monkeys fool around when their mothers sit down to groom each other. It's the equivalent of human parents meeting for a coffee while the kids play under the table. Orangutans are different because youngsters' play isn't simply a side-effect of adults hanging out – it is something that mothers make happen.

The fact that so many animals bother making time for play suggests it is far from frivolous. For young

animals, it is a rehearsal for life itself. They learn how to communicate, cooperate, compete and resolve conflicts; they push the boundaries of what they can do. This can have tangible repercussions. Brown bear cubs that play more have a greater likelihood of surviving, for instance, while male bottlenose dolphins that are more playful father more offspring.

But play is not just the preserve of the young: one of the biggest mistakes we make is to assume that play belongs to childhood. Adult corvids make no such distinction when they snowboard down frozen roofs. In the animal kingdom, many adults continue to play after they have mastered the skills needed to survive. Far from being a waste of time, play might help adults navigate the challenges that life throws their way.

Scientists now think that this idea may apply to humans too. During the Covid pandemic, Xiangyou “Sharon” Shen from Oregon State University and Zoe Crawley from Vanderbilt University, who study the psychology of human playfulness, found adults who were more inclined to play coped better with lockdown. They didn't see the world as being less stressful or risky. Instead, they were better at finding ways to work around problems and remained more optimistic. As the pair put it, playful people don't wear rose-tinted glasses. Playfulness doesn't remove stress, but it can change the way you experience it.

This doesn't mean that we should all break out into a spontaneous game of tag. Instead, playfulness is about cultivating a flexible, curious approach to life. Play is less about what we do and more about how we do it. So, to all the parents staring down the barrel of six weeks of childcare and wondering how they will survive: don't just arrange playdates for your children. Make room for a little playfulness yourself. Messing around is not a sign that you take life less seriously. It may be one of the things that keeps you sane.

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ILLUSTRATION: GUARDIAN DESIGN/GETTY IMAGES/ALAMY



The enduring appeal of Esperanto

It had long seemed to me like an idealistic movement that had failed. So why was its annual congress so vibrant and full of young people?

Katie Thornton

One day, as a 16-year-old in the late 2000s, I received an AOL instant message from my friend Kenyon. He wanted to know whether I had heard of Esperanto, the universal language. Kenyon was several years older than me, and something of a mentor. Like me, he was a musician - he engineered my teenage band's first record - but unlike me, he had a head full of trivia that made him the confidently nerdy star of any Saturday-night gathering of outcasts. His pitch: Esperanto was invented in the late 19th century by a Polish-Jewish ophthalmologist named LL Zamenhof, who aimed to create a language so irresistibly easy to learn that it would be adopted as a shared second tongue by people the world over. From a position of mutual understanding, world peace would surely follow. Yes, the language had been around for well over 100 years and, yes, universal fellowship had yet to be achieved. But the internet had inaugurated a new era of global connectivity, and users could learn through an abundance of online classes. Perhaps we were on the verge of an Esperanto renaissance. Kenyon had been practising for a few years and was practically flua.

As a typical adolescent, I was in the midst of my own social awakening. I had begun to travel the US playing music, relying on nothing but the hospitality of friends of friends of friends. I was finding communion and what felt like boundless possibility in mass bike rides and sweaty dance parties in derelict churches. I was also dabbling in the world of hitchhiking and freight-train-hopping, visiting new places by exploiting the only slightly off-limits mechanisms of our industrialised society. Goods needed to move, and I could move with them, thanks to the kindness of



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those who showed me the ropes just because I wanted to learn. Esperanto seemed comparable: another disparate social club with a baked-in rejection of the forces, writ large and ill-defined, that sought to divide us. But even then, its goals felt redundant: the internet had already given me new tools to communicate across distance and difference. Simple as it might be to learn the language, why bother?

Eventually, the collective optimism of the early internet dissipated, and I forgot about Esperanto. Then, a few years ago, I acquired a shortwave radio, capable of picking up analogue broadcasts from around the world. Browsing the schedules of international programmes - which, to this day, are transmitted by national governments and large missionary organisations - I learned that both the state-run China Radio International and, until recently, the Vatican ran regular shortwave broadcasts in Esperanto. Curious, I thought.

Reminded of my youthful brush with the language, I decided to join the estimated million-plus people who have taken to Duolingo to try it out since Esperanto debuted on the platform a decade ago. Soon I was climbing the ranks of the app's leaderboard, reading aloud what sounded like a dream-warped version of Spanish. Egged on by the company's signature green owl, I translated sentence after sentence that seemed pulled from the index of a modern-day Little Red Songbook ("Who is that worker?", "Is the thief guilty?", "Do the police help us?"), lofty one-liners reflecting peacenik aspirations ("There are too many wars in the world"), and sentiments betraying a delusional sense of the language's reach ("Learn Esperanto to talk to the world").

For a satirist or a cynic, Esperantists are easy fodder. Many of its enthusiasts are undeniably eccentric: longhairs, train enthusiasts, nudists and Brazilian spiritists (who believe that Esperanto is the language of the vastly more peaceable spirit world, and that it was sent to Earth from God, via Zamenhof, to bring about universal harmony). But Esperanto was once a force in global politics. Before facing heavy persecution during the second world war, it gained serious traction in international labour, anticolonial and anarchist movements. And most of today's Esperanto adherents are neither naive nor even particularly batty. They include European social democrats and anarchists, Chinese communists, central African youth pacifists and Ukrainian-independence advocates. There are Esperantist gay-rights advocates, Bible translators, lawyers and Go players. Why, against all evidence to the contrary, would this motley group - many of whom are no strangers to global conflict - still believe that the widespread adoption of a century-and-a-half-old invented language may yet overpower the world's divisions, particularly as the global order, by any reasonable account, appears to be rapidly disintegrating?

Besides, even more so than during the AOL years, international communication can now be mediated by technology, translated instantaneously via app and aided by the ascendancy of English as a de facto lingua franca. But for Esperantists, none of this comes close to solving the fundamental problem of human disconnection. "If our aim is only to buy a hamburger, then [those tools] are enough," Petro Baláž, a prominent Slovakian Esperanto publisher and educator, told me. "But it's something totally different ... to speak about the meaning of life, to travel through the world, to have really deep conversations."

Baláž's portrayal of Esperanto as a nontransactional, humanistic alternative to industry-specific language crash courses and tourist-friendly pocket guides appealed to me. I wondered whether this optimistic coterie of devotees may be on to something after all - and what the rest of us could salvage from what might otherwise seem like an ill-fated, bittersweet experiment.

So, last summer, after months of solitary, gamified study, I registered for the 110th annual World Esperanto Congress, a gathering hosted by the Universal Esperanto Association. For eight days, I would join more than 1,000 paying attendees from more than 60 countries in the sterile classrooms of a university

in Brno, Czechia, to speak nothing but Esperanto, ponder the status of the language and pull a series of surprisingly late, raucous nights. I didn't expect to leave a convert, but hoped that the congress may at least offer a chance to shed some of my *cinikismo*.

"Saluton!" Greetings rang out through the halls of Brno's Mendel University. It was the opening evening of the congress, and a decidedly back-to-school energy was in the air as reunions between distant associates clogged the already packed corridors. The Movada Foiro, or Movement Fair, is the first major event of every global Esperanto meeting - and, I had been told, the beating heart of the convention, where Esperantist organisations of all stripes gather to promote their particular pet causes. Representatives sat two to a folding table, each stacked high with literature. At one, Catholic Esperantists handed out prayer cards. At the next, a pan-European organisation working to make Esperanto the official language of the EU attracted a number of visitors, but far fewer than the International Federation of Esperanto Railwaymen. Esperantist doctors rubbed shoulders with members of the International League of Blind Esperantists, and the World Association of Esperantist Non-Smokers edged in on the Ukrainian Esperanto Association. The International Esperanto Naturist Organisation showered passersby with pamphlets featuring stock photos of aspirationally fit, naked bodies. One of its representatives attempted to sign me up for a swimming excursion. "*Senpaga!*" she said excitedly. Free!

All week, these and other clubs would host lectures and activities. Some sessions would focus explicitly on how to promote the language's use, discussing what Zamenhof called Esperanto's *interna ideo*: the notion that a simple, neutral language could promote global peace. Other seminars had no outright connection to Esperanto beyond the fact of being held in the language: there were talks on the history of space travel and the James Webb telescope; the intersection of behaviourism and brutalist architecture; and China's spring festival.

I had been studying the language for only a few months and felt a bit shaky in my ability to comprehend some of these lectures. I couldn't, for example, provide the word for "brutalism" off the top of my head. But I still managed to grasp about half of what was said to me at the Movada Foiro - and significantly more after reciting my go-to line: "*Mi estas komencanto. Bonvolu paroli malrapide.*" I am a beginner. Please speak slowly.

Zamenhof never intended his language to evolve wholly organically. Instead, its rules are governed by the Akademio de Esperanto, a body founded at the first World Esperanto Congress (in Boulogne-sur-Mer, France, in 1905) with the mandate to "preserve and protect the fundamental principles of the Esperanto language" and "control its development". That mission makes sense: the survival of a made-up language demands a tight ship, since dialectical differences and

patois often birth entire new "natural languages". Esperantists cannot have "rizz", and the acceptance of malleable, unregulated internet slang such as "six seven" would threaten the entire social contract upon which the experiment is predicated.

Esperanto must nevertheless keep up with the times. So the academy - a panel of 45 linguists, scientists, philosophers and others - makes formal recommendations about how the language can and cannot change. It fields comments and queries from Esperanto speakers year-round, but perhaps most notably in a public forum at the annual congress. (In Brno, questions from attendees concerned gender-fluid pronouns and the paucity of technical terms relating to strangled instruments.) The academy then takes these requests under advisement and, very occasionally, updates the Esperanto dictionary. (It last released a new "official supplement" in 2023, only the 10th since the language's inception.)

This rigid, top-down process can seem incongruous with Esperanto's democratic principles. In some ways, this level of control is not so different from that governing certain national languages: the Académie Française decides and disseminates linguistic standards; Italy's Accademia della Crusca is devoted to "purifying" the Italian language; and Spain's Real Academia Española fulfils a similar purpose. But whereas these other bodies seek to entrench national identity by enforcing linguistic rules, Zamenhof wanted to police language in order to transcend those very boundaries. It was all there in Esperanto's interna ideo: neutrality required standardised simplicity.

Zamenhof was born in 1859 in Białystok, in what is now Poland and was then part of the Russian Empire. The city's population was diverse and fractious, with religious and ethnic groups who spoke Russian, Polish, Belarusian, German, Yiddish and Hebrew, and often came to blows with one another. Zamenhof spoke each of these languages and also studied Latin, Italian, Greek, English, Aramaic and French. When he was 10, he wrote a play called The Tower of Babel, or a Białystok Tragedy in Five Acts, in which the scriptural citadel is recast as Białystok's town hall. Zamenhof believed that the constant clashes in his home town and beyond were, above all, the product of semantic heterogeneity. He decided to devise a new language, one that would strive for what Esperantists call *finvenkismo* ("*fin*" meaning final, "*venko*" meaning victory): Esperanto would become nothing short of the world's salvific second language, unifying all individuals and governments.

In 1887, before his 30th birthday, Zamenhof published a plainly bound Russian volume titled, simply, International Language, laying out a system of root words, modifiers and grammar, and outlining the project's political ambitions. Per his own linguistic conventions, Zamenhof wrote under the pen name Doktoro Esperanto: one who hopes. Almost immediately, early enthusiasts began to refer to the language as Esperanto.

This was hardly the first attempt at a shared, constructed tongue. There was Solresol, a 19th-century language based on musical notation, and the largely monosyllabic Volapük, invented by a priest who believed himself to be divinely inspired. But while these predecessors quickly sputtered out, the avowedly internationalist Esperanto took off, particularly among a growing cadre of anarcho-syndicalists, socialists and "anationalists", a term popularised by the Esperantist labour organiser Eugène Lanti to describe those who rejected the idea of nationhood. These early Esperantists circulated self-published books on how to speak the language and periodicals written in Esperanto that sought to introduce their political movements to a global audience. The language was sometimes referred to as the "Latin of democracy".

In the early 20th century, one follower created an international currency with coins featuring Zamenhof in profile; at one point, the tender was accepted by multiple European banks and had account holders in 43 countries. Esperanto speakers included Leo Tolstoy, Ho Chi Minh and George Soros's father, who was born Tivadar Schwartz in 1893 but later changed his family's

The Ludwik Zamenhof Centre in Białystok, Poland

PHOTOGRAPH: MIECZYSLAW WIELICZKO/ALAMY





last name to an Esperanto word meaning “will soar” to avoid antisemitic persecution in his native Hungary.

Zamenhof died in 1917, but his burgeoning movement exploded after the first world war. In the shadow of the war to end all wars, people desperately hoped that the human race would never again tolerate such fevered violence, and Esperanto grew hand in hand with the pacifist movement. In 1920, the newly formed League of Nations considered the introduction of Esperanto to schools in member states. Thirteen countries, including India and Japan, endorsed the proposal. But representatives from Brazil and France dissented – worried, respectively, that it was a language for “ne’er-do-wells and communists” and that it would corrupt the “French genius”. Not long after, the proposal was abandoned entirely.

Esperantists were undeterred. In the early 1920s, the novelist and Esperantist dilettante Upton Sinclair predicted that, by midcentury, “9,995 persons out of every 10,000” would be listening to the radio in Esperanto or a similar universal language. By the late 1920s, there were more than 40 regular Esperanto radio shows, ranging from language instruction to national news, broadcast from well over a dozen countries.

But Esperanto’s political roots eventually caught up with it. In 1937, Joseph Stalin, himself a former dabbler in the language, reversed course on Esperanto and herded its speakers into gulags on account of its internationalist appeal. During and shortly after the Spanish civil war, General Francisco Franco’s regime, too, persecuted Esperantists for the language’s association with anti-nationalism and anarchism. In Mein Kampf, Adolf Hitler cast Esperanto as a Jewish conspiracy. The Nazis would go on to ban the instruction of Esperanto in schools, dissolve all Esperantist organisations and murder all three of Zamenhof’s children.

Though Esperanto would never again occupy the mainstream, the movement refused to die. During the

Stalin, a former dabbler in the language, herded Esperanto speakers into gulags, on account of its internationalist appeal

PHOTOGRAPH: ALAMY



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cold war, it flourished in the Soviet Union among jeans-clad youths looking to connect with speakers on the other side of the iron curtain, as well as among those wanting to resist western hegemony. It also grew in Asian countries such as China, which was in the midst of a romanisation effort intended to combat illiteracy and the challenge of typing characters in an increasingly digitised world. The roman characters of Esperanto were easier to read than Chinese characters, and had the added benefit of combating the accelerating reach of English. (The man behind pinyin, China’s official romanisation system, was an Esperanto scholar.)

Then came the internet. Less than a year after Wikipedia debuted, it launched a network featuring articles written originally in Esperanto; today, there are nearly 400,000 articles in the language, more than those written in Danish, Urdu, Uzbek, Greek, Thai or Bulgarian. There are online classes in Esperanto, subreddits in Esperanto and Esperantist YouTubers. In the UK, as Brexit saw many remainers grasping at vestiges of internationalism, Esperanto classes saw a noted uptick in registration. Crowds of new learners trekked to language intensives at a stately Tudor

home known as the Esperanto House in the village of Barlaston, near Stoke-on-Trent, the hub of England’s post-second-world-war Esperantist activity. Up the road in nearby Smallthorne, Britain’s first Esperantist pub, the Green Star – founded in the 1960s and named for the once widely recognised insignia that Esperantists across the world wore on their shirt collars – received a fresh smattering of media attention.

There’s a pattern here: whenever the global order enters a new state of disarray, the movement sees a resurgence of interest, just enough to keep the crusade from dying out. Its historic proximity to success is a legitimising anchor for the movement. But it can also function as a bit of an excuse – allowing believers to attribute its failures to repression or bad luck, a fluke of history, rather than consider the possibility that language alone may be insufficient to foster world peace. Compelling as Esperanto’s interna ideo may be, I found it hard to imagine mere mutual comprehension overcoming the worst of human politics.

Making my way through Mendel University’s campus buildings en route to one of dozens of available breakout sessions, I was approached by Seyed “Amir” Javadi, an Iranian hotelier who now lives in Germany. “Come to my hotel!” he shouted in Esperanto, waving brochures at me. “Free for Esperantists! I cook! I teach dance classes!” To prove this last point, he grabbed me by the waist and led me firmly through a basic German waltz, counting – “unu, du, tri” – before breaking into an a cappella rendition of My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean with tweaked lyrics: “*Esperanto estas la lingvo por ni, por ni!*” Esperanto is the language for us!

Amir’s hotel was in Esperanto City, otherwise known as the village of Herzberg am Harz, in Lower Saxony. At the urging of several resident Esperantists, the town council decided to formally embrace the language in 2006. Local officials began posting translations on street signs and offering classes in schools. Today, the municipality doesn’t seem too eager to promote its affinity with the international language (its tourism office tends to focus more on local castles and caves), but Herzberg has achieved near-mythic status among some Esperantists. And it’s not the only port of call for speakers of the language: 80 miles east of Nantes, in France, the 44-acre estate of Kastelo Greziljono (Grésillon Castle) hosts regular Esperantist events and has been owned by the nonprofit Kulturdomo de Esperanto (Culture House of Esperanto) since 1951. When I spoke with one of the French leaders of the Esperanto Naturist Organisation, he informed me that members would soon be gathering there for a whole week of “teaching Esperanto in the nude”.

Destinations such as Herzberg and Greziljono are evidence of one of the modern Esperantist movement’s central enticements: the promise of travelling the world on the cheap. In the 1970s, the World Esperanto Youth Organisation began compiling a global contact list of Esperantists willing to host other speakers for free homestays. Self-published as a booklet they dubbed *Pasporta Servo*, or Passport Service, it functioned like a predecessor to the web’s Couchsurfing or Warmshowers, and today persists online as a fully fledged travel network for Esperantists.

Many of the younger millennial and gen Z *kongresanoj* (“ano” means a member of a group, and the suffix -j is used to make any noun plural) I met at the congress were there largely thanks to the *Pasporta Servo*. Some were drawn first to the language and its interna ideo, only to later realise the travel benefits involved; others had learned the language specifically to bum around. (On the *Pasporta Servo* website, the requirement to learn Esperanto isn’t mentioned until the final paragraph of its About Us page, under the heading “This can’t be true. What’s the catch?”) At one language class in Brno, I asked a young German woman seated next to me why she was learning Esperanto. Her cousin was fluent, she said, and together they had already crossed Europe using the *Pasporta Servo*. They planned to do Asia next.

Some Esperantists have embraced the tramp lifestyle full-time. Among them is a 33-year-old Brazilian named Georgos





Jurobola, whom I met upon arriving at the congress. “*Kiel vi fartas?*” (How are you?) he had asked me with a high five as I approached the check-in desk. Tall, assured and just a tad unkempt, he had a breezy, hippy-ish style and a disarming smile that comforted me as I plodded through my first Esperanto conversations, wherein far more experienced speakers than I expressed surprise that I had come all the way from the US, and then recounted fond memories of their own travels through the country.

I came to learn that charming and calming attenders was Jurobola’s formal role. In exchange for volunteering as a greeter at these gatherings, he received free lodging and connections to Esperantists abroad. He had been travelling nonstop since 2019. Last year, he travelled through Africa after volunteering at the congress in Tanzania, and after Brno he was planning to hitchhike around Europe, staying with other speakers. “I am completely nomadic,” he told me. “When I arrive to a new place, I write to Esperantists, and immediately I have friends.”

It would have struck me as unrealistic if not for the fact that I, too, spent a formative phase of my young life as a voluntary vagabond, and saw firsthand how willing strangers were to put me up on the basis of nothing more than a shared dedication to a style of music, or to particularly dangerous modes of transportation. But whereas that world could be characterised, at times, by macho one-upmanship that felt almost bloodthirsty, Esperantists like Jurobola were committed to a hazy vision of peace. “Let’s use Esperanto as a tool for prosperity, for hope,” he told me. “And also to change this idea that there are certain people that are superior to others. This is a shit idea.”

Though they rarely articulate it as such, enthusiasts such as Jurobola are essentially embracing a strain of Esperantist thought known as Raŭmismo. The ideology emerged at a 1980 youth congress in the Finnish city of Rauma, where a faction of just under 100 signatories ratified the Rauma Manifesto. It declared that Esperanto was having an “identity crisis”, and that it was time to abandon efforts to officially enshrine the language anywhere. The signatories went so far as to deride many of what they saw as finvenkismo’s principal tenets – among them that “the English language is our enemy”, and that “the UN must adopt Esperanto” – as “myths”. They suggested instead that the language be considered a community-building tool and declared that they “conceive[d] of Esperanto as belonging to a self-chosen diaspora linguistic minority” – in essence, as a subculture.

Those who believed in finvenkismo scorned Raŭmismo. But at last year’s congress, it seemed its followers had won the day. Among the most packed sessions I attended were those given by the Philatelic Esperanto League and the International Federation of Esperanto Railwaymen (the latter complete with a PowerPoint presentation about historical Czech train routes and architectural renderings of Brno’s future rail station). Other lighthearted events – such as a football match that pitted young Esperanto speakers against a Brno club team, and an excursion to a local winery – were buzzing as well. And though I didn’t take my would-be naturist recruiter up on the swimming excursion pitched at the Movement Fair, about 20 Esperantist nudists briefly ditched the congress, crammed into a tram car, and journeyed half an hour to a nude beach. The once-militant politicking of the anational anarchists and militant trade unionists, it appeared, had largely given way to niche hobbyists and feelgood social practitioners.

One of the Esperanto Naturist Organisation’s leaders was a sprightly Frenchman named Thierry Spanjaard. Recently retired from the cybersecurity industry, he had first learned about Esperanto from his first world war veteran turned pacifist grandfather, and began learning it about two decades ago. I asked him what, if anything, Esperanto had to do with naturism. “The official definition of ‘naturism’ is respect for oneself, respect for others, and respect for nature, thanks to practising nudity with other people,” he said, almost pitying me for my obliviousness.



‘Esperanto is good for Africa as it is not a colonial language. It is everyone’s property. That is the gift Zamenhof gave us’

“What is Esperanto? Respect for other people and other cultures thanks to a common, neutral language.”

I wondered what the movement’s self-publishing, labour-striking, Nazi-fighting forebears would have made of his definition. But when I asked Spanjaard about the criticisms levelled against the movement, he all but rolled his eyes. He wasn’t too worried about finvenkismo, he said. In fact, he didn’t think many people really believed it would be achieved, at least in their lifetimes. He had far more modest, realistic expectations of what the language had to offer: “It’s fun. I meet interesting people. It’s a means to travel.” If that’s the endgame, he said, “I’m perfectly happy.”

After the third day, I considered the way in which Esperantists seemed to regard joy as non-negotiable, a necessary counterweight to the movement’s more politicised elements, which can sometimes come across as holier-than-thou. Humphrey Tonkin, the former president of the Universal Esperanto Association and something of a celebrity in this world, put it more concisely to me: “If you are into the English-speaking peace movement, what are you doing there?” he asked. “You talk about peace. You talk about it *really* seriously. In fact, you probably talk about it so seriously that you bore the hell out of people.”

I was beginning to see the appeal of this position. I could appreciate that fighting for a cause should not, as the Russian anarchist Emma Goldman once said, “demand the denial of life and joy”. But even as an outsider, I felt frustrated by Esperanto’s apparent forfeiture of its once-grand, lucid political ambitions.

Yet I managed to find vestiges of the older ethos. Late one morning, a large group of us piled into a

LL Zamenhof (1859-1917), the inventor of Esperanto

PHOTOGRAPH: CHROMA COLLECTION/ALAMY

✱ **Katie Thornton** is a writer based in Minneapolis. This article was supported by the Matthew Power Literary Reporting award and originally appeared in *Harper’s*

classroom for a presentation on the Esperantist pacifist movement in the civil-war-torn Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). A last-minute visa issue had kept the presenter out of Czechia, so Espoir Ngoma Kasati, a 28-year-old Esperanto activist and instructor from the DRC, stepped in to take his place.

Esperanto has deep roots in Africa. The language first reached the continent in the early 20th century and gained popularity during the postcolonial era as a politically neutral replacement for the still-persistent languages of European colonisers. An Esperantist from Germany who dropped in on the gathering noted that none of the African attenders were “more than 35 years old”. The language, it seemed, had a special resonance among the first generation of post-independence Africans, who hoped for an end to linguistic division and factionalism across the continent.

In the DRC, local Esperantists had partnered with Catholic missionaries and international aid workers to help bring relief to orphaned children. Their use of Esperanto was practical: the DRC is one of the world’s most linguistically diverse nations. International volunteers didn’t share a language, either, and Esperanto was relatively quick and easy to learn.

“Esperanto is good for Africa because it is not a colonial language,” Kasati told me. “Esperanto is everyone’s property. That is the gift that Zamenhof gave to all humankind.” Esperanto was a necessary precondition for the kind of “mutual understanding” that might some day beget peace, Kasati believed.

A few powerful institutions have been playing the long game with the language’s potential for soft power. The Chinese government, which once promoted Esperanto heartily, still makes an appearance at each year’s congress. A cheery display called Mutual Learning Between Civilizations: Cultural Exchanges Between China and the Czech Republic lined the major artery of the congress’s main building.

The Catholic church, similarly, has maintained a certain interest in Esperanto. The Vatican authorised Esperanto for liturgical use decades ago, and Radio Vaticana still publishes news and papal updates in Esperanto online three times a week. Priests adopted the language early on, in the hope that it could help reach potential believers in a tongue easier than Latin. The International Union of Catholic Esperantists (Internacia Katolika Unuiĝo Esperantista, or IKUE) was formed in 1910, receiving support from the Vatican. Among the IKUE’s earliest members was Titus Brandsma, a Dutch friar who helped write an ecclesiastical Esperanto dictionary. A member of the resistance during the second world war, he was captured by the Nazis in 1941 and transferred to Dachau, where he was the victim of medical experiments before being murdered by lethal injection. Four years ago, the church canonised him.

The IKUE’s main event at the congress was a mass, held on Brandsma’s feast day in a small yet magnificent 18th-century chapel attached to a 13th-century monastery, tucked into the old, tangly city centre. Inside, the arched ceiling was painted with faded heavenly landscapes. As a non-practising Catholic, I sheepishly took a seat in the back.

From the altar, the priest – whom a fellow clergyman introduced as being *el Ĉinio*, or from China – delivered the readings, blessed the eucharist, and invited us to *interŝanĝi* the sign of the *paco*. I understood that the whole experience – fumbling through hymns in a centuries-old Czech church, at a mass given in Esperanto by a Chinese priest on the feast day of a Nazi-fighting Esperantist saint – was likely to be counted among my life’s strangest. But in the moment, what most impressed me was its normality. The mass, by design, was familiar to everyone in the room. Like the language in which it was given, the ritual was formulaic, even staid. And in this rote, dutiful steadiness, I was struck by the patient sincerity of it all – and by a sense that these believers were already fomenting, in admittedly small numbers, the kind of unity the language was invented to facilitate. As an impostor – a fake Catholic and fake Esperantist – I felt a pang of jealousy. ●

Established 1906

Country diary

North Yorkshire

“Just seen a gorgeous hare and thought of you. They’ve had an unbelievable breeding season.”

Like most farmers, my friend Richard is always busy and often exasperated. But he’s also refreshingly cognisant of his privilege and determined not to blow the opportunity to make a difference. Nature is always part of his management, and now and then I get a message sharing a wildlife update and take it as a cue to visit.

The fields here are mostly small and rolling. There are ponds and wet scrapes, woodlands and huge hedges with worlds inside them. The margins are wide, and hard-to-cultivate corners are given over to scruffy wildflower mixes for birds and pollinators. There is always cover, always food. I follow one busy, buzzy margin after another. All are humming with insect life: grasshoppers, crickets, hoverflies and bees, butterflies and beetles, and riddled with the tunnels of field voles, the trails and scats of badgers and flat ovals where deer and hares have lain.

I follow one of the larger trails on all fours through a hedge into a field of bright gold wheat stubble, and as I emerge a roe doe breaks cover and bounds lightly into the open, red as a fox in her thin summer coat. And then I see the hares, a dozen or so, dark against the gold. The deer has alerted them to my presence and they sit tall, braced against the earth.

I use the standoff to study the nearest through binoculars and think, not for the first time, that there is something uncompromising about a hare. Partly it’s the extraordinary ripped physique, but mainly it’s that all-seeing eye - dark-lined, furious, like that of an Egyptian god: sovereign, unknowable, inalienable. The whole creature is a hieroglyph that resists decoding.

Of course, these are among the most persecuted of our wild mammals. The despicable “sport” of coursing is booming under the influence of international organised crime, but these small gods don’t know it, and when they do move, it’s at an unflustered lope rather than a run. They know exactly where they are going, and this is a landscape where they have options.

Amy-Jane Beer

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How Burnham can make his devolution plan work

Your editorial (23 July) rightly identifies the structural paradox at the heart of Andy Burnham’s devolution agenda - that it takes a confident assertion of central power to give real power away. But one institutional mechanism that goes some way to resolving this paradox operationally deserves mention: the National Infrastructure and Service Transformation Authority (Nista), which has sat jointly between the Treasury and the Cabinet Office since April 2025.

Inherited from Keir Starmer’s government, Nista (with about 250 civil servants) merges what were the National Infrastructure Commission and the Infrastructure and Projects Authority into a single body reporting simultaneously to both departments. Under Starmer, the Cabinet Office side of that dual accountability was relatively weak. Under Louise Haigh’s new Office of the Prime Minister and Cabinet - explicitly endorsed by the Institute for Government as implementing long-called-for structural reforms - that balance may shift.

Nista becomes, potentially, the operational expression of the relationship between Haigh and John Healey, the new chancellor, that your editorial identifies as

central to whether Burnham’s ambitions survive contact with Treasury orthodoxy.

Whether it works will depend significantly on Healey. Your editorial frames him as “not a big beast of the species likely to build a power base to rival Mr Burnham”, which may be accurate. But it understates the more interesting question of his formation. Before entering parliament, Healey spent years in disability rights and trade union work - at Mind and the Trades Union Congress, where he helped design the national minimum wage.

That pre-parliamentary biography suggests a chancellor whose instincts may align more naturally with the “preventive state” agenda than his Brown-era Treasury service implies. His predecessor Denis Healey’s capitulation to Treasury orthodoxy in 1976 shaped British politics for 50 years - the stakes of getting this relationship right are that high.

The paradox that your editorial identifies is real. Nista, under a genuinely strengthened Cabinet Office, is at least an attempt to resolve it institutionally rather than just rhetorically.

Rabbi Jeff Newman
Finchley, London

● Andy Burnham’s determination to make regional devolution a reality rather than a catchphrase (remember the “northern powerhouse”?) is laudable and potentially gamechanging, but it depends so much on the ability, altruism, efficiency and drive of the regional mayors and civic leaders whose job it will be to deliver it. How many of them have the capability that Andy Burnham has shown in Manchester?

I suspect the truth is that we don’t really know. How many of us even know the names of these people, never mind what their particular strengths and proclivities are? And if that is true of those in our own region, how much more so of those we entrust to deliver in their part of the country, within the context of the national interest? Who are they, what is their motivation and what got them into the positions they occupy?

If Burnham’s policy is to be carried out properly, our expectations of these representatives have now become much wider. They are potentially champions of us all. I for one would be interested in a Guardian profile of these key regional ambassadors.

Having been in regional development in a past role myself, I have seen both good and bad, and I recognise how crucial these roles can, and must, be if they are to be the engineers of growth for us all.

David Williams
Hexham, Northumberland

No, customers don’t prefer bots to humans

According to Centrica’s boss, Chris O’Shea, most people using British Gas prefer to talk to a chatbot rather than a person (Prefer to deal with a chatbot? British Gas says most people do, 24 July).

He says that 90% of his customers prefer to use digital channels than speak to a person in the first instance, and that the number of customer calls has fallen by 20%. Well, this is hardly surprising, given the difficulty of getting through to a real person. Finding a telephone number to do so is a challenge in itself, and then

there are all the layers of numbers and deflections to encourage use of the digital channels while you are kept on hold at your own cost before you can get to an employee.

We are being gaslit by large companies, including banks, that have gradually withdrawn face-to-face access to customer service, which is more expensive, but more efficient from a customer’s viewpoint. First we saw the emergence of contact centres taking phone calls, and then digital channels of access to a human, and now it is digital access to a bot.

The cost saving goes to the company and the cost is exported to customers in the time and effort they have to spend having a text message “conversation” with a robot. Clearly for these large firms, company human time is precious, while customer human time is not.

This is not about improving the quality of service or adding value to the customer experience. It is simply naked cost reduction using available technology, and removing the expense of employing people from the balance sheet. Customer preference has nothing to do with it.

Charles MacKinnon
Glasgow

Councils can lead on housing improvements

Your editorial quoting Sam Johnson-Schlee saying that our ability to trust that our homes will keep us safe is under threat is not news to environmental health officers working in housing (Dealing with rising temperatures demands a collective approach, 24 July). Every day they are faced with homes that contain threats to the health and safety of occupiers - from excess heat or cold, or damp and mould. For many years there has been a lack of resources, including environmental

health staff to inspect homes or the political will to tackle the problems on the scale needed.

You are right to suggest that a new approach is required, but we can also learn from the 1970s, when local authorities would take the lead on collective action to improve housing. So councils should be the place to look to get things moving. This will require funding, not only to help homeowners but also to ensure that councils have sufficient staff with the right skills.

After the 1981 English House Condition Survey, which showed the high rate of disrepair in the housing stock, the government introduced generous repair grants, and contributed £1bn through subsidies. The decision to discontinue funding for the private sector housing renewal programme, which had been reduced to £376m in 2009-10, was a result of austerity. Perhaps Andy Burnham and Angela Rayner need to revisit the past to learn what can be done.

Dr Stephen Battersby
Environmental health and housing consultant (retired)

Corrections and clarifications

● An article said that Wael Sawan, the CEO of Shell, received a pay rise of 60% to £13.7m (FTSE bosses paid 130 times more than average worker, 20 July, p25). After publication, Shell told us that this was not a pay rise, but a transition to full pay following a three-year vesting period.

● We misnamed an England football supporter, Rachael Judge (Fans feel the drama, 16 July, p6, later editions) as “Rachel George”.

Editorial complaints and corrections can be sent to guardian.readers@theguardian.com

My thrilling Odyssey on BBC Sounds

Re Christopher Nolan’s Odyssey, Charlotte Higgins urges us to watch the film, but also read the poem - “you won’t regret it” (Journal, 25 July). I bypassed the verse and went straight to Simon Armitage’s stunning four-hour radio adaptation of Homer from 2004, now on BBC Sounds, which helped, thrillingly, to clarify much of what remained a bit murky in the movie.

Quentin Falk
Little Marlow, Buckinghamshire

● Re your article on lobbying the government (Why do our environment ministers keep chickening out, 23 July), the NHS trust I worked for had a policy that prevented doctors from meeting drug representatives without a pharmacist present. This ensured doctors’ prescriptions were based on good evidence rather than drug firms’ promotions. Perhaps it’s time for a similar system to be put in place when MPs meet lobbyists.

Stephen Carter
Cullompton, Devon

● As a dedicated reader of the obituaries, I notice that the deceased regularly succumb to a “short illness”. It would be helpful to have more information so I could avoid this malady and continue to read the Guardian for a little longer.

Dr Terry Scragg (aged 85)
Walberton, West Sussex

● When I was growing up in Birmingham, what we now call elevenses was known as lunch (Letters, 27 July). It consisted of Jacob’s cream crackers thickly slathered with butter. These were considered healthier than cake.

Jane Gregory
Emsworth, Hampshire

● Don’t Involve Yourself: just watch others struggling with the flatpack (Letters, 25 July).

Lorraine Haldane
Hove, East Sussex



Bill Oddie

Comedy star in The Goodies whose love of birds led to a career as a wildlife presenter

Bill Oddie, who has died aged 85, was a multi-talented performer who found his greatest comedy success on television with his fellow Cambridge University Footlights members Tim Brooke-Taylor and Graeme Garden in The Goodies, a sketch show that combined the anarchic elements of Monty Python's Flying Circus with "silly" sight gags.

Oddie's self-taught musical skills steered the trio into the charts with his compositions – pastiche rock'n'roll songs such as The Funky Gibbon and Nappy Love. And when that was all over, he carved out a new career as the small screen's most

famous birdwatcher, credited with encouraging new generations to become enthusiasts for the natural world.

Oddie's path to fame began when he wrote musical numbers for the Footlights revue A Clump of Plinths. He appeared in it at the 1963 Edinburgh festival with other Cambridge students, including Brooke-Taylor and the future Pythons John Cleese and Graham Chapman. Within weeks, the show, retitled Cambridge Circus, transferred to the West End of London, and to Broadway the following year.

A 1963 BBC radio version was turned into a sketch series, I'm Sorry I'll Read That Again, which ran for six years from 1964. After the first year, Oddie was joined as the show's regular scriptwriter by



Oddie at Rainham Marshes, Essex, in 2001, main image; and with Kate Humble and Simon King on the BBC Springwatch series, 2007

BARRY PHILLIPS/
EVENING STANDARD/
SHUTTERSTOCK; BBC/
STEVE BROWN

Garden, a later Footlights recruit. When its successor, I'm Sorry I Haven't a Clue – an improvised parody of panel games – began in 1972, Oddie was a team member for two years.

Brooke-Taylor and Garden continued on that show after Oddie left, but kept their partnership with him going on TV in The Goodies, which started in 1970 and carried on for 10 years. In this, they all wrote and appeared in surreal sketches blending slapstick and stop-motion film techniques as they travelled around on a "trandem" (a three-seater bicycle) – frequently falling off – for their agency promising to do "anything, anytime". Oddie was projected as the hairy, untidy one, Brooke-Taylor as pompous and Garden as professorial.

When the BBC struggled to find a budget for further episodes, ITV took it on with a 1981 Christmas special and a six-part series the following year.

After a foray into children's TV, Oddie threw himself into communicating his lifelong love of birds and other wildlife to viewers in series such as Birding with Bill Oddie (1997-2000), and Bill Oddie Goes Wild (2001-03), as well as one-off documentaries in far-flung countries.

He teamed up with Kate Humble and Simon King to present the live outside broadcasts Wild in Your Garden (2003) and Britain Goes Wild With Bill Oddie (2004), which evolved into the popular, long-running Springwatch and Autumnwatch that are still going strong – though Oddie was dropped in 2008 and replaced by Chris Packham.

He always had a reputation for being a bit grouchy and famously refused to be featured on This Is Your Life. When, in 2001, Michael Aspel approached him with his big red book and the words, "Bill Oddie, this is your life," he responded: "It's not. I always said I wouldn't do it and I won't." His family eventually persuaded him to go ahead with the show and it was screened early the following year. "I'm known as a bit of a bad-tempered bugger," he admitted.

Bill was born in Littleborough, outside the Lancashire mill town of Rochdale, to Lilian (nee Clegg) and Harry Oddie. He was brought up from the age of six in the Birmingham suburb of Quinton by his father, who broke out of his family's history in the mills by becoming an accountant, and his paternal grandmother, Emily.

His mother had been committed to a psychiatric institution. Oddie grew up believing she had been diagnosed as schizophrenic and abandoned him, and he saw her only a few times before her death in 1990, while recalling a distant relationship with his father that he put down to his domineering grandmother, whom he could credit only with fostering in him a love of birds.

Later in life, Oddie experienced bouts of clinical depression and believed they had been caused by the emotional turmoil of his childhood. When he traced his family history for the BBC genealogy programme Who Do You Think You Are? in 2014, he admitted: "If anybody had asked me, 'What do you think of your mother?' I would just say, 'I hate her.'"

Doing research for the show, he was told by an aunt that his mother miscarried one baby,

He was respected by his birding peers despite his fame rather than because of it



*Oddie with Tim Brooke-Taylor, left, Graeme Garden, and their 'trandem' in an episode of *The Goodies*, 1973*
SOUTH COAST PRESS/REX/SHUTTERSTOCK

then - before his birth - had a daughter who died at five days old, when his grandmother stopped her checking the girl in her cot. Two of those who cared for his mother at the institution said she actually suffered from manic depression, not schizophrenia. Visibly moved, Oddie expressed regret that he had seen his mother so little and said he realised that she was "in no way negligent" but "immensely unlucky".

At the same time, he credited his father with ensuring he had a good education, at Halesowen grammar school, then King Edward's school, Birmingham. As a child, he spent his spare time watching birds at a reservoir and his observations were included in the West Midland Bird Club's annual reports.

While studying English literature at Pembroke College, Cambridge, he continued this pastime and had ambitions to become a warden of a bird reserve.

Oddie wrote for the final episode of the satirical TV series *That Was the Week That Was* in 1963 and appeared regularly in its second sequel, *BBC-3* (1965-66). He both wrote and performed in *The Frost Report* (1966-67), *At Last the 1948 Show* (1967), *Twice a Fortnight* (1967), *Broaden Your Mind and Marty* (both 1968-69), and contributed scripts to *Hark at Barker* (1969), and *Doctor in the House* (1969-70) and its sequels.

In 1983, he married Laura Beaumont (his second wife), who wrote children's books and television programmes. He also played drums in her band, *Too Many Westerns*, and together they wrote for ITV's anthology series *Dramarama*, aimed at young viewers, and their own children's sitcom, *From the Top* (1985-86), in which he starred as a bank manager-turned-actor. He and Garden wrote the sitcom *Astronauts* (1981-83), and he and his fellow *Goodies* voiced the superhero cartoon *Bananaman* (1983-86).

Oddie said that being dropped from the *Springwatch* and *Autumnwatch* series after the 2008 programmes had a "detrimental" effect on his mental wellbeing and he had made two suicide attempts. In January 2020, he said that he was overcoming depression and bipolar disorder

by taking lithium, but eight months later said he had been "very ill" with lithium toxicity.

His many books included *Bill Oddie's Little Black Bird Book* (1980), *Birding with Bill Oddie* (1997) and his autobiography, *One Flew into the Cuckoo's Egg* (2008).

He was a member of the RSPB council, president of the League Against Cruel Sports and a vice-president of the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers. In 2003, he was appointed OBE for his wildlife conservation work.

Oddie is survived by Laura and their daughter, Rosie; by Kate (the actor Kate Hardie) and Bonnie, the daughters of his first marriage, in 1967, to the actor-singer Jeanne Hart, which ended in divorce; and by three grandchildren.

Anthony Hayward

Stephen Moss writes: In many ways, Bill Oddie was the exact opposite of David Attenborough, that other towering figure in TV about the natural world - he was more excited by blue tits than blue whales, quirky rather than serious, and above all utterly unpredictable. He was the jazz musician to Attenborough's concert pianist: his free-form style giving his programmes an appropriately organic feel.

Like his friend Michael Palin, Bill was one of that select band of TV presenters who achieved fame in two totally different fields: in his case, comedy and natural history. His deep knowledge of birds came from a lifelong passion, and he was respected by his birding peers despite his fame, rather than because of it.

As a TV presenter, he broke every rule in the book: looking at the bird rather than towards the camera, wandering off in search of his quarry, and always ad-libbing his dialogue. On the live-format *Springwatch*, he was in his element - as the series producer, I simply had no idea what he would say or do next.

He was utterly committed to his work; and in my view, was one of a handful of true geniuses to have graced our television screens.

Bill (William Edgar) Oddie, actor, writer and ornithologist, born 7 July 1941; died 25 July 2026

Meriel Dickinson

Mezzo-soprano who helped revive works by the German composer Kurt Weill

The mezzo-soprano Meriel Dickinson, who has died aged 86, was recognised internationally for both her classical and contemporary vocal repertoire.

In operas, oratorios and premieres of new works, she performed with some of the greatest composers of the last century - Benjamin Britten, Pierre Boulez, John Cage and Aaron Copland - as well as leading conductors such as Adrian Boult and Simon Rattle.

Highlights of her career included Beethoven's Choral Symphony at the 1969 Vienna festival under George Szell. She recalled: "I was understandably nervous of Szell. His somewhat autocratic manner had been known to subdue the London Symphony Orchestra ... In the end he was very charming, complimenting me on my voice and German pronunciation."

In the 1960s Dickinson began a longstanding partnership with her brother, Peter, the composer, pianist and author, performing in recitals, BBC broadcasts and recordings. They excelled in contemporary and experimental music, championing composers such as Erik Satie, George Gershwin and Charles Ives, and commissioning Lennox Berkeley and Andrzej Panufnik. Peter's compositions combined different genres and sounds, from the experimental to ragtime, and he wrote several works for his sister, including song cycles to poems of EE Cummings, a reflection of their shared literary passions.

Meriel's other premieres



Dickinson's voice was likened to 'lush velvet' GERALD STYLE PHOTOGRAPHY

included Gordon Crosse's *Memories of Morning: Night*, a BBC commission composed for her and performed by the BBC Symphony Orchestra under Colin Davis at the BBC Proms in 1973. Her opera and musical theatre appearances ranged from Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin* with Welsh National Opera (1980) to Stephen Sondheim's *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* at the Theatre Royal, York (1982).

From the mid-70s she became a key figure in the Kurt Weill revival, acclaimed for her interpretations of roles in Mahagonny Songspiel and *Happy End* in Berlin in 1975. Both works were recorded by Deutsche Grammophon with the London Sinfonietta conducted by David Atherton, who regarded her rendition of Weill's music as "second to none". In 1989, she was cast as Emma Jones in Weill's *Street Scene* for productions staged by Scottish Opera and English National Opera. Dickinson later recalled: "I enjoyed playing the vituperative Mrs Jones, but had some problems with my dog - the only time I have worked with an animal ... The dog walked to the front of the stage and relieved herself. The audience ... roared their approval."

She was born in Lytham St Annes, Lancashire, into a musical family. Her father, Frank Dickinson, was an optometrist who also had a passion for music, and her mother, Muriel (nee Porter), was a dramatic recitalist who specialised in poetry performances.

In 1958 she entered the Royal Manchester College of Music (now the Royal Northern College of Music). On graduating in 1963, she saw a vacancy advertised for the BBC Singers, and joined them in time for their Proms concert.

A soprano sitting next to her, Valerie Heath Davies, became her mentor: "[Valerie] advised me to consider leaving the Singers, on the grounds that I was using only a fraction of my vocal ability, and to study in Vienna with her teacher, Hans Karg. I remember trying to explain to my anxious father my reasons for abandoning what looked like a job for life to chance my luck in a wider context. I was only 23 and full of optimism." On a scholarship, Dickinson moved to Vienna and trained at the Academy

of Music and Performing Arts with Karg, receiving a distinction in the recital diploma.

In 1967, she toured Germany with Peter Pears, the tenor and Britten's life partner, and the Schütz Choir, conducted by Roger Norrington. She also sang in Schumann's *Scenes from Faust* conducted by Britten, of whom she wrote: "He was a perfectionist and, not working full time as a conductor, he would seem nervous and rather irritable if things did not go according to plan. The results were always superb, whether he was playing or conducting."

In 1964, aged 24, she made her London solo debut with the Park Lane Group. Her rendition of songs by Hugo Wolf, John McCabe and Britten prompted Andrew Porter in the *Financial Times* to note that it was "a performance that one would have liked to take away on record".

She met her future husband, Robert Gardner, when, in 1979, she joined the Old Vic Theatre Company for a double bill of plays with music celebrating the bicentenary of David Garrick. Gardner was the wig master. They married in 1991.

In 1997, she retired from performing but continued to teach, at the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire. Her friend the former BBC music producer Jill White described Dickinson as "warm-hearted and extremely kind, with a wicked sense of humour", likening her voice to "a lovely dark and lush velvet".

Peter died in 2023, and Meriel is survived by her husband.

Dalya Alberge

Meriel Dickinson, mezzo-soprano, born 8 April 1940; died 1 May 2026

Birthdays

Val Bourne, gardening writer, 76; **Santiago Calatrava**, architect and structural engineer, 75; **Beverley Craven**, singer-songwriter, 63; **Jim Davis**, cartoonist, 81; **Maureen Freely**, writer, 74; **Lady (Susan) Hayman of Ullock**, animal welfare minister and former Labour MP, 64; **Kelly Hoppen**, interior designer, 67; **Leo Houlding**, climber and mountaineer, 46; **Air Chief Marshal Sir Richard Johns**, former chief of the air staff, 87; **Harry Kane**, footballer, 33; **Anna Lapwood**, organist, 31; **Delfeayo Marsalis**, jazz trombonist and record producer, 61; **Neil McKendrick**, historian and former master, Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge, 91; **Riccardo Muti**, conductor, 85; **Dame Barbara Stocking**, former president, Murray Edwards College, Cambridge, 75; **Robert Swan**, polar explorer and conservationist, 70; **Aléxis Tsípras**, former prime minister of Greece, 52; **Hannah Waddingham**, actor, 52.



Yesterday's solutions

Killer sudoku

Easy

7	9	1	4	8	3	2	5	6
5	6	8	2	1	9	4	3	7
2	3	4	5	7	6	8	9	1
1	4	3	9	6	7	5	8	2
6	2	7	8	3	5	1	4	9
8	5	9	1	4	2	6	7	3
9	8	2	7	5	1	3	6	4
4	7	6	3	2	8	9	1	5
3	1	5	6	9	4	7	2	8

Medium

5	4	3	8	9	7	2	1	6
7	1	8	5	6	2	4	3	9
6	2	9	4	3	1	7	5	8
2	5	6	1	7	9	8	4	3
4	9	7	3	8	5	6	2	1
8	3	1	2	4	6	9	7	5
9	8	5	7	1	4	3	6	2
1	6	4	9	2	3	5	8	7
3	7	2	6	5	8	1	9	4

Codeword

E	M	J	D	V	Q	H
D	I	O	X	I	D	E
I	T	T	B	R	A	R
C	R	O	F	T	I	N
T	R	E	E	T	E	R
S	W	E	R	V	E	D
A	A	B	D	H	O	
B	U	Y	O	U	T	
E		G	G	L	A	
T	O	F	U	D	I	
U	U	R	Y	I	M	
B	O	N	A	Z	A	
A	G	I	F	O	I	
S	Q	U	A	T	F	
S	S	Y	E	K	T	

Cryptic crossword

Solution No. 30,069

S	O	U	L	D	E	S	T	R	O	Y	I	N	G
H	N	E	O	E	E	O	G						
A	B	I	G	A	I	L		L	U	M	P	I	
G	F	D	V	A	E	S	E						
G	R	O	W	L		I	M	P	E	N	D	I	
Y	R	I	N	S		L	O						
D	E	M	A	G	O	G							
O		H											
G	R	A	F	T		L	O						
S	V		O	N	T	R	N						
T	R	E	E	H	O	U	S	E					
O	R	O	V	A	E	A	H						
R	E	A	D	I	E	R							
Y	G	S	E	E	O	G	N						
V	E	S	T	E	D								



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Killer sudoku

Easy

The normal rules of sudoku apply: fill each row, column and 3x3 box with all the numbers from 1 to 9. In addition, the digits in each inner shape (marked by dots) must add up to the number in the top corner of that box. No digit can be repeated within an inner shape.

11			22		8		20		19
20			8						
				19		8		19	
10	20	12				23			
				23			9	16	12
8					12				
6	10						5		
	19				15			20	
	13				18				

Medium

13	14			18				9	
				16	9	25			
12	10	12				7	23	12	
23	19	10	22				13		
				13		5		19	7
				4					
6		10	23		12	3	9	16	
11									

Codeword

Each letter of the alphabet makes at least one appearance in the grid, and is represented by the same number wherever it appears. The letters decoded should help you to identify other letters and words in the grid.

2	20	17	26	6		13		9	15	13	26	11
22		14		17	9	3	13	21		25		9
6	2	20		20		13		15	19	20	22	21
26		20	22	17	6	21	7	6		21		
11	13	26	9		23		9	21	8	13	4	15
			20	17	14	9	21	17		22		11
18	6	14	15	22	10		4	9	4	6	2	6
20		20		1				23		15		22
11	16	1	9	23	11		12	14	13	13	15	11
13		2		23	6	5	14	13	2			
2	20	26	6	9	21		6		17	6	18	11
		20		21	13	15	15	14	13	2		9
18	22	1	21	13		1		20		20	5	21
13		15		11	9	17	21	11		22		24
6	11	19	13	11		11		15	20	21	17	11

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13													
14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26													

Guardian cryptic crossword No 30,070 set by Pangakupu

1		2		3		4		5		6		7		8
9						10								
11										12				
										13				
14								15				16		
17						18		19						
20		21			22									23
					24									
25										26				
27						28								

Across

- 1 Rugby player lacking weight put in the shade? (9)
- 6 Words to live by, not initially arse-backwards (5)
- 9 Joe, for one, allowed a padded jacket (5)
- 10 Call for monsoon? Mumbai resident dropping one in a hurry (4,5)
- 11 Tigress, with ‘Yum!’, mauled grumbler (6,4)
- 12 Some charity, perhaps, would be kind (4)
- 14 Showed desire to embrace one in make-up? (7)
- 15 US lawyer ready to accept thanks for information (7)
- 17 A goal almost entirely securing first place in league, in general (2,5)
- 19 Duke’s decline largely involving unknown figure in French scandal (7)
- 20 Desire to lose, discarding diamonds (4)
- 22 Allowing style’s suitable, but not fine (10)
- 25 Pompous Unionist blocking a timid one, mostly? That’s of doubtful value (9)
- 26 Friend I’m backing to invest in a success (5)
- 27 Big noise in family group estranging nearly all? (5)

- 28 Drink in the past contributing to atmosphere in islands (9)

Down

- 1 How stamps are affixed? Crikey! (2,3)
- 2 Starry Parisian is one active in political group (9)
- 3 University brought in rare title, fantastic writing (10)
- 4 Book salvaged from rubbish daughter stored (7)
- 5 Peculiar warped wits hosted by talks provider? (7)
- 6 A way with meter and rhyme? (4)
- 7 Fish like the location where fish are readily shot? (5)
- 8 Stereo apt to distort musical works (9)
- 13 US actress swallowing whisky up - by the way, it’s illuminating (6,4)
- 14 A chap is upset about scripture lessons being hypocritical (9)
- 16 Promoting us following cake decoration appearing to be enough (9)
- 18 Billionaire probing work unit soon (7)
- 19 Starring role involving some cut upset the old girl (7)
- 21 Government committee’s firm support (5)
- 23 Unrefined Imperial measure? (5)
- 24 Eager to see name removed from a medal (4)



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Scoop of the year!

We taste 2026's weirdest ice-creams, from Marmite to earl grey and olive oil

Zoe Williams

What TV could teach politicians

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How we made

Harry Potter and the Cursed Child

page 9



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Roster dating

Age: The term seems to be about a decade old; the practice is much older.

Appearance: Hectic.

What is it? It's dating more than one person at a time.

You mean what we used to call cheating? No, more like what we used to call playing the field.

If it's not new, why are we talking about it? Because gen Z have cottoned on to it.

Them again. I'm afraid so.

Let me guess: have they taken a messy arrangement born of indecision, insecurity and poor scheduling, and recast it as something intentional? Intentional and growth-enhancing.

How so? Because roster dating is, at its core, a journey of personal discovery. "One of the biggest pros of roster dating is that you can learn so much about yourself," one dating expert told Vice.

If you ask me, these gen Zers know too much about themselves already.

The important thing is to be open and honest about your intentions with everyone on your dating roster.

You mean you tell them? Not necessarily – you may simply assume that everyone on your roster also has a roster. But you shouldn't lie.

How many potential suitors make up a decent roster, then? The dating coach Sara Tick recommends keeping it to five or fewer.

Five? How am I supposed to keep track of five separate people? The idea is that they each fulfil a specific need: an exciting one, a devoted one, an artistic one, a rich one ...

Then how am I supposed to find five completely different people who like me? They might not all like you – they might just have an open spot on their roster they need to fill.

Let's just call this what it really is: an inability to commit on any level. Commitment isn't necessarily the destination with roster dating – it's about letting go of expectations, and not wasting all your energy on a single connection.

Fine, but all this presumes that dating is fun, when really it's anxiety-ridden, soul-destroying and expensive. The last is certainly true – research indicates that the average cost of a gen Z date has risen to \$205 (£155).

In that case, I can't even afford a roster of three. Reading between the lines, you get the impression that the singles who swear by roster dating are never the ones paying.

Do say: "I really think we've got something very special, but I have limited availability this month."

Don't say: "Of course I'll marry you, Frank! Sorry, I mean Fred."

Zoe Williams



It seems TV writers are better at predicting the future than politicians

In the BBC's new apocalypse drama, *The Rapture*, the UK is engulfed in a terrifying heatwave. I watched a preview of the programme in May, while preparing to interview the lead actor Ruth Madeley. I thought at the time: "This will be much more frightening when it chimes with the real-life weather; bad luck for them that it's not coming out for a couple of months." But, by the time of meeting Madeley the following month, we were already in the middle of a heatwave that would lead to the highest ever recorded June temperature in the UK. The whole encounter made the show feel even more prophetic. She was in a central London hotel, air-conditioned inside, but all the door handles and surrounding street furniture had got way too hot. It was like playing *The Floor is Lava*, except instead of "floor", "everything". It surely can't hit the screens at a more apposite time than this, I thought, failing to predict that by late July we'd be in heatwave number three, and France would be on fire.

The Daily Mail's reviewer was upset that Christianity was portrayed "as a bastion of anti-science nutjobs and fundamentalists" in the show, wondering rhetorically whether the BBC would ever create such a drama about a "Muslim imam". Peculiar thing to get upset about, I thought, since the religion is really more of a symptom of, or even a garnish to, the central atmosphere of engulfing heat. It's like complaining that cats get a bad rap in the 1974 film *The Towering Inferno* (yes, there is a cat in it).

TV puts a particular pressure on itself to describe the world it lands in, even when a show is developed at least a couple of years before. Often, the safe way to play it with surrounding factors – weather, politics, fashion – is to keep things so general that they could be any time this century. Every so often something will land that relates so tightly to current events, you forget to admire its foresight and just assume it was written yesterday. Season two of *Criminal Record*, the police drama that Peter Capaldi

lifts so far above procedural you forget the police have procedures, opens with a demo outside the Ministry of Defence that turns deadly after the far right smashes through a lackadaisical police cordon. It felt extremely 2026, yet it was conceived before violent far-right protests were a regular news event – before the riots after the Southport attack, before asylum seeker hotels being set alight, before Elon Musk started talking about civil war in the UK. It tightly described a riven politics that had not yet arrived, the series creator and writer Paul Rutman committing himself to a new and sad chapter in our civic life – unnecessarily, really, because watching Capaldi look sketchy is an evergreen delight in any context, but it paid off.

The Rapture was adapted from Liz Jensen's novel, which came out in 2009, so she was looking ahead to the climate crisis 20 years ago. Novels can often hit the future on the nose because they're not trying to predict it by committee; books describing the now obvious billionaire death wish – a new kind of morbid fantasy, in which it's not their own death they're planning for but everyone else's – are notable for their synchronicity. Eleanor Catton's *Birnam Wood* and Naomi Alderman's *The Future* came out in the same year, 2023. The ideas must have germinated at around the same time, 2020, which is surely before even the tech tycoons had landed on this post-humanist outlook, and were still figuring out how to capture all the money in the world as quietly as possible.

Without diminishing any of this creative perspicacity, these are things we all know; extreme weather is coming; a lot of billionaires are preparing for mass death events; politics is getting more divided because people with money are paying to cleave it. The only people not acknowledging this are politicians. They are still, in the middle of a wildfire, complaining that net zero costs too much, and squabbling about the teaspoon of crude oil left in the North Sea. The really remarkable thing is the determination of that averted gaze, denying a future that's already arrived.

Why has Nolan got rid of the sex in The Odyssey?

I did not walk into Christopher Nolan's *The Odyssey* intending to pick holes. If there was zero sexual chemistry between Odysseus and Circe, who was I to say that's not how it went in the poem?

Nevertheless, even allowing for metaphor, even factoring in that Circe's passion for Odysseus is (almost?) definitely a rumination on the double standards of godliness, in which the guy gods can sleep with whichever mortals they please, but the lady ones are not supposed to (I don't think?), I am sure something happened.

Just on the balance of probabilities, I am also sure that something happened with Calypso on the beach; all that elaborate nymph-craft, all that gaslighting and coercive control and anguish-minimisation. Why would she do it if not to keep him for sex? It's not as though she needed a warrior; she didn't even need any DIY done.

The siren song, meanwhile, I had stored as a harmonic iteration of sexual longing. If it had instead, as in the film, been the plangent call of something unnamable that had been irrevocably lost (innocence? The past?), would you really have needed a siren? You'd have been better off with a male voice choir.

Absent all these shagging adventures keeping Odysseus away from his missus, it's a bit of a mystery why it takes him so long to get home. Enter his trauma. He explains carefully – in one of the best, most understated monologues Matt Damon has given – that all the bloodshed had made it impossible for him to return home, feeling that he is neither returning as himself, nor capable of inhabiting his home as the brutalised man he has become without sullyng it.

Totally understandable; I'd lose my sangfroid if I ever had to get inside a horse with no facilities. But this leaves us with a fresh conundrum: if he's so damn traumatised, ending his journey with a mass suitor-killing event is a little counterproductive – one might even say rum.

I understand why Odysseus has to be faithful to Penelope; these are the exigencies of modernity. But desexing the classics is harder than it looks.

▼ Matt Damon in *The Odyssey*



I was 26 – and the doctor had given me six months to live

Holly Dyson was 16 when she first tasted alcohol. It became an addiction that led to abusive relationships and horrendous debt, and destroyed her liver. This is how she turned her life around

Emma Russell

Holly Dyson's last alcoholic drink was a can of cider to manage her withdrawal symptoms, which she had in her dad's car on the way to rehab on 2 May 2023. She'd barely eaten in two weeks. Instead, she spent her last few days at home in the north-west of England vomiting blood into the toilet bowl and lying in bed twitching, feeling unbearably nauseous. Her hand hovered over the numbers 999 on her phone, ready to call an ambulance. At 26 years old, Dyson's body was shutting down.

About a week earlier, a doctor had given her six months to live. For the past few years, her drinking had spiralled out of control. Her liver was "deranged", the doctor said. To Dyson, it felt like "a bowling ball" – weighing her down so much that she would have to use "two hands to lift my body up out of bed because my liver felt so heavy and swollen". Her face was also swollen and she was unrecognisable from the sporty young woman she had once been.

But Dyson was "past the point of caring", she says. "I just couldn't do this any more."

Dyson's childhood in Tarleton, a rural village between Preston and Southport, was blissful. "I lived in a little bubble where nothing bad ever happened and everything was so lovely." She was the only child of happily married parents: "This perfect little blond, happy, everyone-loved-us-family," she says.

That all changed when she turned 12 and her mum moved out. "I absolutely did not see it coming," she says of her parents' divorce. Some research has found that alcohol dependency can be linked

to early childhood trauma, such as divorce, which disrupts emotional development and can cause chronic stress. Now in therapy, Dyson attributes her parents' separation to her developing "an intense fear" of abandonment.

Dyson had her first alcoholic drink at 16 years old – a fruity cider in the park with her friends – but she didn't get drunk until she went to university in Leeds in 2015. "Everywhere I looked there were people doing cocaine, there were people doing pills, there were people doing MDMA." But drugs never held the same appeal for Dyson as drink.

As a student, she quickly made friends at her halls of residence and fell for a "tall, dark, handsome southerner", who became her on-off lover. He accompanied Dyson to her mum's wedding to a new partner in 2016 and became her best friend. But he could also be abusive, particularly on a night out,

▼ *Dyson was the youngest in her rehab facility by 20 years: 'Loads of people were looking out for me'*



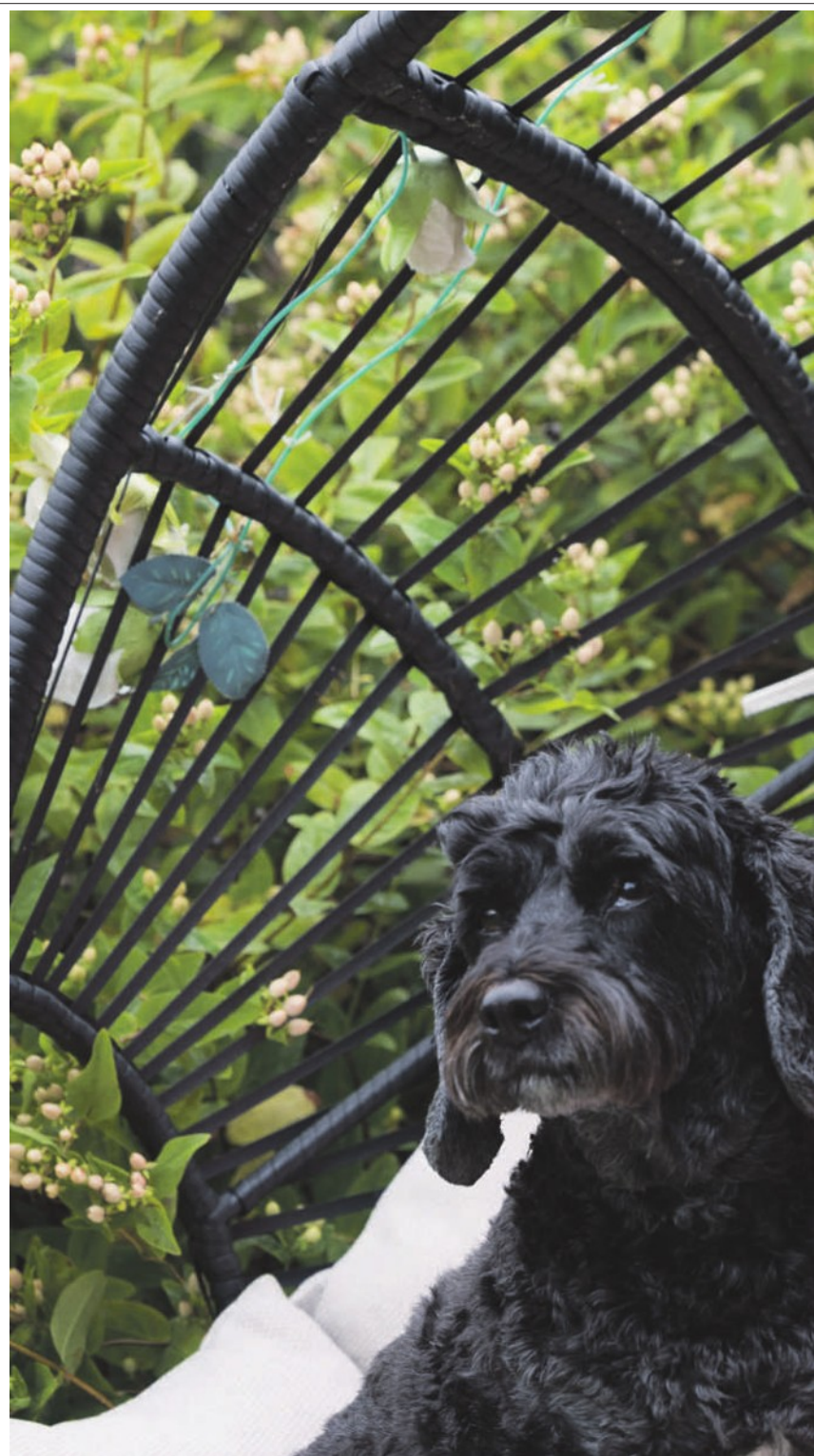
when he would call her derogatory names and grab her wrists aggressively, she says. When Dyson found out he had been cheating on her with two of her closest friends, she couldn't cope with the deceit and pain, and she dropped out of university.

It was on a sunny day in 2017 that she poured herself the drink that would derail her: a gin and tonic, which she drank before heading to her job as a personal trainer. That one "lit up my brain", she says.

Dyson had moved in with her mum and it wasn't long before her stash of gin was gone. She refilled the bottles with water so her mum wouldn't know that Dyson had drunk them alone, then started hiding the evidence in her bedroom and car. It became a full-time obsession. "Your every thought is: 'Where's my next drink coming from? Can we afford the next drink? What are we going to get to drink? Where are we going to hide it?' That's just on repeat."

For the first couple of years, she was good at hiding her dependency. Dyson began living with her boyfriend of a few years, who was very laid-back and never confronted her about her drinking, but friends started to notice. "I looked dreadful," she says. "You couldn't look at me and not know something was wrong." She doesn't ever remember blacking out but she would sometimes wake up covered in mysterious bruises.

Her best friend Alice was particularly concerned; on Dyson's birthday at her house, she bought her non-alcoholic prosecco to celebrate with. "I was deeply offended," says Dyson, who left the celebrations as quickly as she could because she didn't see the point in



a social event without alcohol. At this point she was drinking several bottles of wine a night.

In 2020, Dyson started getting horrendous liver pains and took herself to Southport hospital's A&E, where she met the hospital alcohol liaison team for the first time. A scan found that she had severe liver disease but "it meant nothing to me. I wasn't at the point where I'd hit rock bottom yet," she says. "I

wasn't at the point where I wanted to stop drinking."

Over the next few years, Dyson was in and out of hospital. She switched from gin to cider, which she sipped first thing in the morning to stop the withdrawal symptoms: shaking, vomiting, irritability and a loss of appetite. She would pour wine into a Lucozade bottle, top it up with Lipton's peach ice tea, and drink it

'No physical pain will ever compare to the emotional pain I went through'



◀ Dyson today, with her dog, Luna, who she credits with helping her recovery

'Those final few days before I went into rehab, I saw my dad cry a lot'



▲ Dyson is keen to share the reality of her addiction, in the hope she can help others

throughout the day while working as an administrator. When she finished at 2pm, Dyson would buy more wine on her way home.

By 8pm, she would be very drunk, she says, but would crack open a few more bottles of cider and line them up by the bed, so as not to wake up her partner when she opened them, drinking them "like water" throughout the night. "I had to do everything I could to be able to drink alcohol 24/7."

It was an expensive habit. As soon as she was paid, Dyson would spend £300-400 on alcohol, thinking it would last her for the month. But it would barely last the week. When she ran out of money, she would ask her mum, then her dad, for petrol money, and use it to buy more booze. And when that still didn't cover her costs, she took out loan after loan.

"When five grand drops in your bank account, you go absolutely wild and get the most expensive gins and all the flavours," she says. "It was detrimental to my future because when I came out of addiction I had 10 grand's worth of

debt, I couldn't keep up with the repayments, so now I've got a debt management plan, which means, for the next six years, I can't get a mortgage, and I can't get a credit card because my credit score is ridiculously low."

During her stints in hospital, Dyson was given Librium, the brand name for chlordiazepoxide, to help her manage the acute alcohol withdrawal symptoms. For alcoholics, withdrawal can be deadly, causing confusion, seizures and hallucinations. However, when she returned home, she would self-medicate with cans of cider. She wouldn't be able to walk properly or keep food down. But "once I got through that" with a mixture of patience and more alcohol, she would think: "I'm fixed now, I can drink again."

Dyson's maternal grandmother had died from alcoholism when she was 52, three months after Dyson was born. "My mum thought all the worrying about me might give her a heart attack," says Dyson. But her dad didn't understand the severity of the issue until she visited the

doctor - and he told her father how long he believed she had left to live. He swiftly moved Dyson back into his house and "there were two or three nights where I was so ill, withdrawing, being sick" that he stayed awake with her through the night. He got rid of any alcohol in the house and took away her bank cards. Previously, Dyson had only seen her dad cry once - the day he told her that her mum had left them. "But those final few days before I went to rehab, I saw him cry quite a lot."

Her dad knew there was nothing more he could do for her when she came home with alcohol and downed the lot in her room. Neither of them have any idea how she paid for it. That day, he drove her to a private rehab facility called Ocean Recovery in Blackpool and took out a loan to pay for her care. "If he hadn't got me into rehab when he did, I wouldn't be here," says Dyson.

It is estimated that 15% of women in England drink in a way that damages their health, according to Alcohol Change. From

2019 to 2023, there was a 39% increase in female alcohol-specific mortality rates. Yet women are significantly less likely to seek out traditional treatment programmes, such as Alcoholics Anonymous. Research has found that women and men often drink for different reasons: women to numb, hide or alleviate feelings of shame related to their own victimisation, whereas men more often drink to relax and to distinguish rest time from work. Stigma around addiction can also reinforce women's sense of shame, meaning they are more inclined to be in denial about their dependence on alcohol, and keep it hidden.

Dyson is the first to admit that she had a set idea of what an alcoholic looks like, and it wasn't her. "I had everything going for me: I was a young girl, I was fit, I was active, I had a wonderful family, I had a home, I was safe, I was loved, but that didn't stop it," she says. "It does not stigmatise." On the first morning of her rehabilitation, "I put my head round the door at breakfast and I remember going: 'Shit, everyone is normal.'"

Dyson stayed at the facility for 28 days. "I was the youngest by a good 20 years," she says. "I was the baby. I had loads of people looking out for me." She went on a lot of walks, did group therapy, meditation and yoga. She would paint in the evening, and spent a long time chatting with her peers.

But, she said, the hard work really started when she was discharged, and had to return to life without consistent monitoring

and support. In rehab, Dyson was surrounded by people who had shared the same experience as her, who she could talk with at length about her struggles.

Dyson says her new job as a support worker for the drug and alcohol service Change Grow Live has also helped her to stay sober - talking openly about the pain of addiction is a daily reminder of the difficulties she went through. She still enjoys painting and exercises regularly; she ran a London Landmarks half marathon in April and is training for a full marathon next. "No physical pain, such as running a marathon, will ever compare to the emotional pain that I went through during addiction."

Now, Dyson notices alcohol everywhere and disapproves of the culture of heavy drinking that is prevalent in the UK. She doesn't like the way alcohol is marketed in supermarkets, where there are "buy two crates for a tenner" signs everywhere". She thinks alcohol should be hidden like cigarettes and sweets. "People forget that alcohol is a drug and that there are millions of people with alcohol problems. If you have a really rough day, you walk into a supermarket and before you've even picked up your basket you're seeing all these offers on alcohol in the doorway - that's going to be detrimental to someone's health."

As part of her role at Change Grow Live, she is keen to share the "raw, unfiltered truth of addiction" in the hope that someone experiencing what she did can find the strength to reach out for help. "Let's show what alcohol addiction is really like: it's vomiting blood, it's not being able to get off the bed, it's lying to get money. It's awful," she says. "Admitting you're struggling is the bravest and most important thing that you can do to save yourself."

Recently, Dyson had a scan of her liver, which showed she now has no scarring or fatty liver. "It's more or less completely rejuvenated and has fixed itself." Her blood results also show that her liver function is in the normal range. "That does make me emotional," she says.

"People say recovery is hard and I get it because you've got to work on it every day - once you're complacent, relapses happen," says Dyson. "But I will say addiction is harder than recovery, 100%. Addiction is a full-time 24/7 job." *Taking Action on Addiction provides links to different support services at takingactiononaddiction.org.uk*

Chocolate? Vanilla? That's so 2025!

It feels as if nothing is off limits in the race to build a better ice-cream. But is a scoop of olive oil or gochujang really what you want on a hot day? We tried the best - and worst - of this summer's frozen desserts

Lucy Knight

What's with all the weird ice-cream flavours this year? It feels as if supermarkets and independent companies are vying to make the most novel alternatives to a good old scoop of vanilla. But which are actually worth having? I tried 50 varieties of ice-cream tubs and ranked them from sickeningly sweet to dinner party-worthy.

50. Sicilian lemon and limoncello, Tesco (480ml, £3.50, Tesco)

Inoffensive, but not tart enough. *Taste* 4/10, *Value* 5/10, *Originality* 6/10

49-45. Ottolenghi strawberries and cream with sumac / roasted pistachio and sour cherry / salted malted chocolate / coffee and cardamom / Madagascan vanilla and miso caramel, Waitrose (480ml tub, £6, Waitrose)

I wanted more sumac, more sourness, more malt. *Taste* 5/10, *Value* 5/10, *Originality* 6/10

44. Dubai chocolate, Mister Twist (120ml, £5.50, selected UK stores)



A fun, crunchy take on a trendy flavour. *Taste* 7/10, *Value* 2/10, *Originality* 7/10

43-40. Stem ginger and marmalade / Mini egg / Gingerbread / Cinnamon, Simply Ice Cream (500ml, £6.50, available for UK delivery)

All of these flavours from independent maker Simply Ice Cream were lovely - but none of them blew my socks off. *Taste* 6/10, *Value* 5/10, *Originality* 5/10

39. Matcha, Häagen-Dazs (460ml, £6, Waitrose)

It's easy to write off matcha as a zeitgeisty flavour, but in an ice-cream it's undeniably refreshing. *Taste* 6/10, *Value* 5/10, *Originality* 6/10

38. Irish coffee, Simply Ice Cream (500ml, £6.50, available for UK delivery)

I don't love Irish coffees - but I was impressed by how much this tasted like one. *Taste* 5/10, *Value* 5/10, *Originality* 7/10

37. Cinnamon bun, Waitrose (480ml, £3.50, Waitrose)

Way too few chunks of bun - this felt like a missed opportunity! Artificial-tasting. *Taste* 4/10, *Value* 7/10, *Originality* 6/10

36. Peach melba, Waitrose (480ml, £3.50, Waitrose)

This nails the flavour of tinned peaches with sugary raspberry sauce. *Taste* 5/10, *Value* 7/10, *Originality* 5/10

35-33. Basque cheesecake / Earl grey malted crumble / Ube halaya, Araw (475ml, £8, available for UK delivery)

These felt like underwhelming representations of the unusual flavours they promised. *Taste* 5/10, *Value* 3/10, *Originality* 9/10

32. Caramelised biscuit, Asda (425ml, £2.75, Asda)

Layered with biscuit sauce, this might be even tastier than the official Lotus one. *Taste* 6/10, *Value* 7/10, *Originality* 4/10

31. Flat white, M&S (500ml, £4.50, Ocado)

More like an instant coffee than an espresso-based drink. *Taste* 5/10, *Value* 5/10, *Originality* 7/10

30. Raspberry pavlova, Asda (900ml, £2.67 Asda)

If you're going to sell something as pavlova-flavoured, I think there should be more meringue chunks, but it's cheap and relatively tasty. *Taste* 3/10, *Value* 9/10, *Originality* 5/10

29. Tiramisu, Häagen-Dazs (420ml, £5.75, Tesco)

It is my firm belief that no tiramisu-flavoured thing (and there are an increasing number of them) will ever be as good as actual tiramisu. This didn't prove me wrong. *Taste* 5/10, *Value* 5/10, *Originality* 7/10

28. Sicilian lemon meringue, Asda (500ml, £3.27, Asda)

There were chunks of meringue throughout, and a lemon curd ripple - not bad. *Taste* 5/10, *Value* 6/10, *Originality* 6/10

27. Mango lassi, Moonji (100ml, £3.49, selected UK stores and online)

I was impressed that this vegan sorbet actually tasted like lassi, rather than just mango. *Taste* 7/10, *Value* 3/10, *Originality* 8/10

26. Stem ginger, Salcombe Dairy (500ml, £6, Ocado)

A creamy, gingery delight. *Taste* 9/10, *Value* 5/10, *Originality* 4/10

25. Matcha green tea, Jude's (460ml, £5.75, Sainsbury's)

Slightly milder, and better, in

my opinion, than Häagen-Dazs's version. *Taste* 7/10, *Value* 5/10, *Originality* 6/10

24. Fig leaf and currant jam, Milktooth Gelato (500ml, £9.50, selected UK stores)

Earthy, interesting flavour - but some of the bits of currant were hard and gritty. *Taste* 5/10, *Value* 5/10, *Originality* 8/10

23. Coconut kefir frozen yogurt, Waitrose (480ml, £3.50, Waitrose)

There's a lot going on. Fresh, acidic, a bit sun-creamy - it wasn't as luxurious as I wanted it to be. *Taste* 5/10, *Value* 7/10, *Originality* 6/10

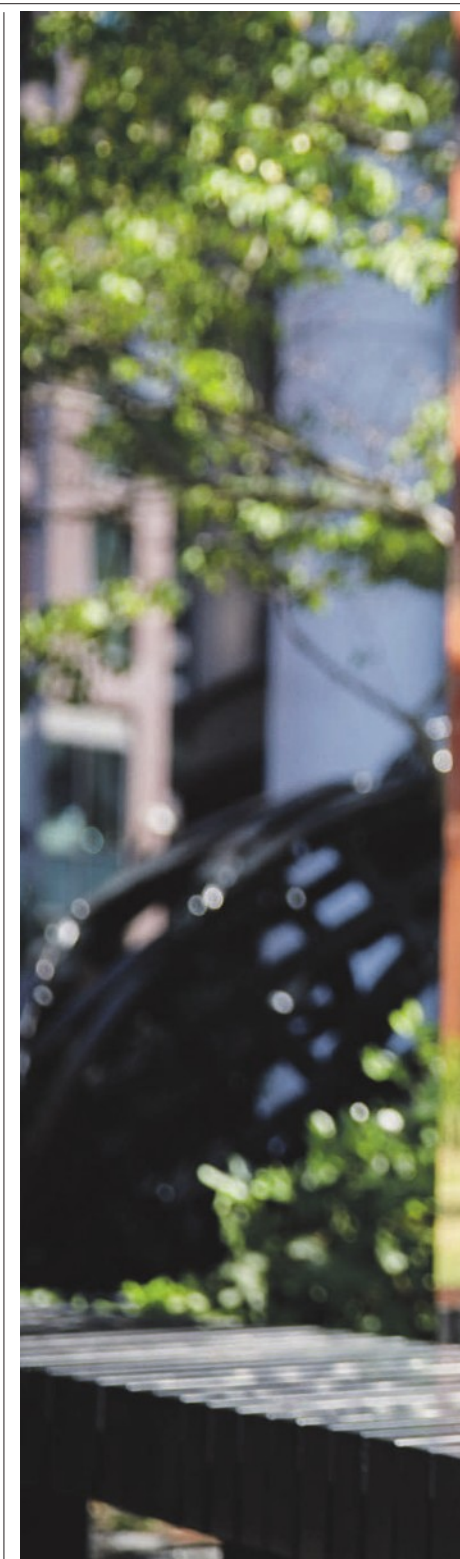
22. Tofu apricot ponzu, Clingy Wrap (350ml, £8, selected UK stores)

This vegan ice-cream had a slightly strange texture but a lovely apricot flavour. *Taste* 4/10, *Value* 4/10, *Originality* 10/10

21. Toscano olive oil, M&S (500ml, £4.50, Ocado)

I loved the idea of this, but the flavour reminded me too much of margarine. *Taste* 5/10, *Value* 5/10, *Originality* 8/10

▼ 'A creamy, gingery delight' ... Stem ginger from Salcombe Dairy



20. Lemon meringue gelato, Aldi (480ml, £2.49, Aldi)

Layered, lemony soft serve. *Taste* 6/10, *Value* 6/10, *Originality* 6/10

19. Marmite on toast, Big Kid (300ml, £8, selected UK stores and online)

Bizarre, but somehow actually not terrible. *Taste* 5/10, *Value* 4/10, *Originality* 10/10

18. Blueberry lavender jam, meringue swirl, Bears (450ml, £11.50, selected UK stores)

I don't love lavender so this wasn't for me - but I could appreciate its creamy delicateness. *Taste* 6/10, *Value* 4/10, *Originality* 9/10

17. Strawberry kefir frozen yoghurt, M&S (500ml, £3.75, Ocado)

Refreshingly tangy! *Taste* 6/10, *Value* 6/10, *Originality* 7/10

16. Tiramisu gelato, Aldi (480ml, £2.49, Aldi)

This layered soft-serve is closer to



▲ Who can resist an ice-cream shaped to look like a chicken drumstick?

◀ Lucy Knight tries out a cornet with a twist

a real tiramisu (I'd still rather have the dessert). *Taste* 6/10, *Value* 6/10, *Originality* 7/10

15-12. Chinese jasmine tea / Hongkongues milk tea / Shizuoka matcha / Black sesame, La Barceloneta (162ml, £4.50, selected UK stores) These four east Asian-inspired tubs from London-based La Barceloneta

are absolutely stunning. Well-balanced, exciting and delicious. *Taste* 9/10, *Value* 3/10, *Originality* 8/10

11. Iced coffee, Sainsbury's (480ml, £3.50, Sainsbury's) This actually tastes like drinking an iced latte - and it's great value for money. *Taste* 7/10, *Value* 6/10, *Originality* 7/10



◀ 'Actually not terrible' ... Marmite on toast

10. Not fried chicken, Life Raft (71g, £4, Iceland) OK, I know this doesn't exactly count as an ice-cream tub, but I couldn't ignore this ice-cream shaped to look like a chicken drumstick - complete with a chocolate pretzel "bone" inside. And it's not all about looks - the waffle-flavoured ice-cream and crushed cornflakes coating make



for a genuinely delicious treat. *Taste* 9/10, *Value* 1/10, *Originality* 10/10

9. Flat white coffee, Jude's (460ml, £5.75, Ocado) Properly strong espresso flavour! *Taste* 8/10, *Value* 5/10, *Originality* 7/10

8. Chocolate Guinness cake, Jude's (460ml, £5.85, Waitrose) Delicious, rich - just on the edge of being overwhelming. *Taste* 7/10, *Value* 5/10, *Originality* 8/10

7-5. Toasted rice / Pineapple jam mezcal / Peach mascarpone, Clingy Wrap (350ml, £8, selected UK stores) I loved this small independent company's fun, exciting ice-creams: the toasted rice one has an almost cereal milk flavour, the mezcal one is surprising but not overpowering, and the flavours of real fruit shine through. *Taste* 7/10, *Value* 4/10, *Originality* 9/10



See all 99 ice-creams at [guardian.com/features](https://www.guardian.com/features)

4. Kalamasi gochujang sorbet, Araw (475ml, £8, available for UK delivery) Zingy and fresh! *Taste* 7/10, *Value* 3/10, *Originality* 10/10

3. Brown bread, Simply Ice Cream (500ml, £6.50, available for UK delivery) For me, this was a great balance of unusual flavour and creamy ice-cream. *Taste* 8/10, *Value* 5/10, *Originality* 8/10

2. Miso banana butterscotch / Cinnamon sponge, Bramley apple jazz, cream cheese frosting, Bears (450ml, £11.50, selected UK stores) I've only just discovered the Kent-based Bears ice-cream and I'm going to be putting everyone I know on to it - both of these flavours were fruity, creamy and delicious. The banana one reminded me of my grandma's banana bread recipe. *Taste* 9/10, *Value* 4/10, *Originality* 9/10

1. Brown butter popcorn, Bears (450ml, £11.50, selected UK stores) Right on the edge of being too salty, this ice-cream is a perfect balance of savoury, sweet, rich and creamy. I'll be traversing corner shops and delis to track it down again. *Taste* 10/10, *Value* 4/10, *Originality* 9/10



‘She wasn’t just acting – she wanted to live it’

A Child of My Own tells the stranger-than-fiction story of a woman who went to extreme lengths to fake a pregnancy – then stole a baby. Its director recounts their meetings in a Mexican prison

Cath Clarke

The CCTV footage of the hospital corridor is grainy but you can make out a young woman carrying an oversized gift bag. Nothing unusual there. Except that inside the bag is a newborn baby girl, just hours old. And the woman carrying the bag, walking out of the hospital’s main entrance, past two security guards who are idly chatting, is not the baby’s mother. Her name is Eleonor Alejandra Marín Mendoza, known to everyone

as Alejandra. When film-maker Maite Alberdi met her in a low-security Mexican prison, Alejandra was in the final year of a 13-year jail sentence for snatching the baby. Alberdi listened rapt as Alejandra told her story: “Everything she was telling me was extraordinary, stranger than fiction.”

It was a tale full of drama and intrigue. Alejandra was 17 and already pregnant when she married her husband Arturo in a fairytale wedding. She’d always wanted children and Arturo was desperate for a son. But then she had a miscarriage, and then another. Still only in her 20s, she underwent IVF.



▲ *All the qualities of a Greek tragedy ... Ana Celeste in A Child of My Own*

After she became pregnant for the third time, she miscarried again – but kept this miscarriage a secret and faked the rest of her pregnancy.

As Alejandra told her story, the twists kept coming. She worked in admin at a hospital, where she met a single mother, Mayra, who was pregnant but did not want to keep her baby. The two women struck a deal: after giving birth, Mayra would hand her baby over to Alejandra. Five months later, Alejandra arrived at the hospital and collected the baby girl. But something went wrong and the police were called. Alejandra was arrested hours later at a nearby hotel, and the baby was returned to Mayra.

“For two years I only heard Alejandra’s version of what happened,” says Alberdi, who is Chilean and earned an Oscar nomination for her 2020 film *The Mole Agent*. She continued to visit Alejandra in prison in Mexico and applied for transcripts of her criminal trial. The process was slow, but finally she received the court bundle. “When I saw the evidence, I thought: ‘Oh no, I was so wrong.’ I crashed into reality.”

Alejandra’s story did not fit the facts. In her witness statements, Mayra said she actually met Alejandra for the first time after she gave birth, when Alejandra walked on to the hospital ward posing as a social worker. There never had been any arrangement between them. Instead, Mayra faced the unimaginable terror of her newborn baby being kidnapped

◀ *Desperate for a son ... Armando Espitia as Arturo, with Celeste*

▶▶ *‘Everybody has an opinion about motherhood’ ... director Maite Alberdi*

► ‘There’s so much magic!’ ...
Jamie Parker as Harry Potter
with Poppy Miller as Ginny
PHOTOGRAPH: MANUEL HARLAN

‘When I saw the evidence I thought, “Oh no, I’ve been so wrong!”’

from her hospital cot. The evidence was on her side.

Alberdi could not ignore what she was reading. Did she think about ditching the film? “Yes! I wasn’t sure if I could continue. I was really disappointed.” But the thought of doing that must have been difficult, after spending so much time with Alejandra, being so invested in her story? “Si, yes. I trusted her, but my gut feeling was that I believed the evidence. It was hard.”

Did she confront Alejandra? “Yes! She denied everything, and she continues saying that until today.”

Despite the shock revelation, Alberdi stuck with the film. She says that from the beginning, what she connected to in the story was the pressure that drove Alejandra to the edge - to conceal her miscarriage and pretend that she was still pregnant. “It was not about the case; it was about the situation. I was more interested in why she faked a pregnancy. It was a question of the social pressure of motherhood in Mexico, in Latin America.”

Her Netflix documentary A Child of My Own begins with a dramatic reconstruction starring actor Ana Celeste as Alejandra. The story has all the qualities of a Greek tragedy. But the way Alejandra recounted it was more like a soap opera, over the top and full of melodrama. And that’s how Alberdi has filmed it, depicting Alejandra’s version of what happened in the style of a Mexican telenovela. She guesses it’s about 80% accurate. And it is hilarious in places - farcical and wacky as Alejandra binge eats to gain weight and fakes an ultrasound scan. “When she told me the story, we were laughing.”

It’s funny until it isn’t. At her lavish baby shower, surrounded by family and friends, Alejandra looks dazed and alone. “You know, she went to yoga pregnancy classes,” says Alberdi. “She wasn’t just acting for

others. She really wanted to live it.” Does Alberdi think Alejandra came to believe her own deception? “Completely. And if you see the archive footage, it’s not a fat woman, it’s a pregnant woman. So it’s like she did have a psychological pregnancy. She wanted to believe, and at some point, she was living that lie.”

In the dramatisation, Alberdi reveals the pressure Alejandra felt to have a baby. After each of her miscarriages, she is castigated as a failure. Her mother-in-law blames her: “You should have been more careful.” Her husband Arturo is sympathetic up to a point, but his disappointment adds to her guilt. Alberdi is at pains to point out that she is not trying to justify Alejandra’s crime but to understand the context.

Has the situation changed for women since 2009, when Alejandra faked her pregnancy, I ask. Before the sentence is finished, Alberdi cuts in: “In Mexico and in Latin America, no. There is the same pressure to be married and have kids.” At a recent screening in Mexico, a Q&A was derailed as women in the audience stood up to share their stories of struggling with fertility and the pressure to have a baby.

As a mother of an eight-year-old, Alberdi says she too is aware of constant judgment: “Everybody has an opinion about how you are living motherhood, all the time.” She has lost count of the number of times that people at film festivals - “mostly men” - will ask her who is looking after her son.

Alberdi’s film crashes down to earth, just as she did. In the second part of A Child of My Own, the reconstruction ends and Alberdi interviews Alejandra and her husband Atruro, who was also arrested and spent two years in prison before being acquitted at trial. She speaks to the judge at Alejandra’s trial, and a psychologist. There is also an interview with Mayra, the baby’s mother, whose fury and trauma are still raw. For her, a 50-year prison sentence wouldn’t have been long enough, Alberdi says. “She suffered so much. I understand that she cannot forgive Alejandra.”

A Child of My Own is not a typical Netflix true-crime documentary, nor is Alberdi the kind of director you’d expect to make one. She has a reputation for the kind of work that premiere at prestigious film festivals. The Mole Agent followed a spy in a care home for the elderly, revealing the loneliness of residents. The Eternal Memory was an intimate study of a celebrity couple in Chile coping with Alzheimer’s disease. Alberdi made her fiction debut with the 2024 drama In Her Place.

I’m curious if she watches true crime. “Yes,” Alberdi replies, not exactly brimming with enthusiasm. She proceeds diplomatically: “I enjoy it as a viewer, but I don’t connect emotionally.”

The trouble is, she says, that we live in an age of snap judgments and instant opinion. But she never has an instant opinion. “*El matiz ...*” she frowns, pulling out her phone to translate a word from Spanish “Nuance! True crime is the opposite of nuance. Everything is more complex in reality.”

A Child of My Own is on Netflix from 13 August

HOW WE MADE



Harry Potter and the Cursed Child

‘The ripple of energy and anticipation from the audience was almost visual. It was like opening a new Star Wars film - I didn’t hear a phone go off once’



Jamie Parker, played Harry Potter

My initial response when I was asked if I was interested in the role was confusion - I felt a bit long in the tooth to play a teenager. I had read the first Harry Potter book and seen a few of the movies, but was just past the right age when it was all kicking off. I didn’t know about the coda in the final book that places the action 19 years later, and that’s where the play would be picking up from.

I’m happy to admit now that I thought the show was a terrible idea. But a lot of hit shows *are* terrible ideas on paper. And I’m used to eating my own words - which began the moment I saw the team involved.

Of course, once I took the role, I had Stephen Fry’s readings of the books on a loop. By the time I got through the rehearsals, the year in London and then the year in New York when it went to Broadway, I had listened to the entire series seven times and was a bit of a Potterhead.

The two parts of the play are the story of the next generation coming up, and of chickens coming home to roost, but it wasn’t a one-man show and the pressure felt shared. Everything you do ends up being a crucible for your own neuroses that you pestle and mortar into some kind of grit that you use to make the theatre piece. Like Harry, I was barely 12 when I also got on a train and went to a boarding school in Scotland. I also had round glasses!

I’m always looking for things that challenge me, and I had never done anything like this with all the magic. Playing various musical instruments helped - there’s a musicality built into the rhythm of the illusions. But, as anyone in my life will tell you, I can’t walk through a doorway without banging the back of my hand against the latch - my spatial awareness is dreadful. That I went through all those tight entrances and exits, and around all those bits of heavy moving machinery at speed, in the dark, without ever doing myself or anyone else serious mischief is a miracle.

There were occasional moments when things didn’t go as planned. One night in the duel scene with Alex Price (Draco), I gesticulated and my wand caught on part of my clothing. It helicoptered downstage right. I launched myself after it and blindly reached into the dark with half my torso off the stage in the auditorium. Somehow I caught it. Alex just went, “YES!!!” - like he was watching the cricket!

During the first preview, the ripple of energy and anticipation in the theatre was almost visual. It was put to us that this was like opening the new Star Wars

film but in one cinema worldwide - we had audiences coming from Australia to the Philippines to Canada. There was a real sense of this being a precious, even sacred space. Audiences were in their seats 10 minutes before the start and I didn’t hear a phone go off once. I’ve never known attentiveness in an audience like it.

Jamie Harrison, illusions designer

When I got the first draft I couldn’t sleep for three nights, thinking, “What have I done? This is so full on. There’s so much magic!”

There were moments that Jack Thorne had written into the script - “and they vanish” or “a spell happens here” - and it was up to me to decide what to do. Then there were other points where we knew exactly that it had to be a Patronus charm, or the Polyjuice potion that turns one character into another.

People often think that magic and illusion are off-the-shelf. They say, “Who invented that?” But I’ve always tried to draw on the work of brilliant illusionists of the past while reworking them so that we’re bringing something new. I’m not going to reveal any of our secrets, though. Absolutely not! I can say that people often think there are trapdoors being used in sequences where there aren’t. The show uses shadows and light in ingenious and incredibly precise new ways. It might look very organic and handmade, but there is an absolute wodge of technology involved and a huge crew. There are a lot of computers - it looks like a spaceship.

The Expelliarmus spell (where a wand jumps from one person’s hand into another’s) is a highly skilled effect that the performers have to start practising on day one - there’s a real knack to getting it right. That was the first thing that I had to show JK Rowling when she came to one of the early workshops. We set up a presentation, but none of the performers were confident enough to do it yet. So John said, “You’re going to have to perform it.” I was more nervous than the flipping actors! I demonstrated it and she went, “Oh! Do that again!” You know you’ve got somebody if they ask to see it again. I was thrilled. I wanted to say no, a magician never repeats his tricks, but it was JK Rowling, so, yes, we did do it again.

Interviews by Imogen Tilden. The original, two-part Harry Potter and the Cursed Child celebrates its 10th anniversary on Thursday and is at the Palace theatre, London, until 20 September; the one-part production opens on 9 October



PHOTOGRAPHS: NETFLIX; JOHN PHILLIPS/GETTY IMAGES FOR BFI

REVIEW BY LUCY MANGAN

Furious



A proper grownup thriller powered by sheer female rage

★★★★☆

Disney+

Furious is well named. It is powered throughout its eight-episode run by an unfaltering current of female rage. It is the creation of Elizabeth Meriwether, who gave us last year's astonishing *Dying for Sex* (starring Michelle Williams as a woman with terminal cancer discovering the range and depth of her sexuality for the first time) and 2022's brisk, brilliant *The Dropout* (the tale of Elizabeth Holmes, the disgraced founder of the blood-testing company Theranos). They were both based on true stories. *Furious* was apparently inspired by the 1987 film *Black Widow*, starring Theresa Russell and Debra Winger, but it has jettisoned the marry-and-murder-for-money plot and contemporised the rest so thoroughly that the result hardly seems to merit the dutiful hat-tip the publicity has given it.

Meriwether is the writer of the first three episodes; the rest are divided among four women and one man. The drama itself is dominated by three complicated and fascinating female characters, played by Emmy Rossum, Lola Petticrew and Quincy Tyler Bernstine. A fantastic supporting cast and a lean, evocative script make this television for grownups, television to pay attention to and television to entertain you enormously.

Furious opens with a man crawling across an apartment floor. A tiny, childlike woman (Petticrew) in a Halloween cat mask watches him as she gets sweets for a child at the door. "I'll be back in a minute," she says, then returns when he's made it to the stairs, injects him with something and lies down next to him to watch him die.

Rossum plays Alice Black, a former NYPD officer who left the force after her childhood sweetheart turned fellow cop boyfriend turned violent drunk assaulted her so badly that she was hospitalised. When she reported him to their lieutenant, virtually the whole

department turned against her. Now she's manning the FBI tip line, waiting for a job in the sex crimes unit.

She gets a call from her one remaining friend, Danny Kelly (Scoot McNairy) - who suffered the consequences for supporting her at her old job. He needs her help investigating the case of the body on the stairs - that of Caleb Easton, the scion of local billionaire Jay Easton. It's clear that his "overdose" was staged. Alice notices similarities with an old case and, as further clues and bodies accrue, the detectives conclude that they are on the hunt for that rare thing - a female serial killer.

Alice uses this as an in with the sex crimes unit boss, Nora Washington (Bernstine), who becomes a sort of unofficial mentor to the new FBI agent, in part as an act of self-salvation. What follows is partly a standard thriller, as they discover a sex trafficking ring implicating the powerful people who have been helping themselves to young women and children with impunity for years. But it's also a *Killing Eve*-like cat and mouse game between a detective who is gradually coming to bond with her quarry. And, not least, it's a character drama that explores the different ways in which reactions to similar traumas can manifest themselves.

There are plenty of harrowing scenes, but not the ones you would expect. There is no lingering on the murders. There is little gore. But there is an early moment - not much more than a look, really - between Alice and her sister at the latter's hen party that speaks to a heartbreakingly unbridgeable chasm between them. There is an awful, shocking scene when one of the few people Alice loves and trusts suddenly turns screamingly against her. And a quietly magnificent, quietly terrible scene by a hospital bed involving a monologue from Nora that distills the revulsions and the bone-deep despair of her years spent watching children being abused and "never, *never*" really being able to make a difference to the amount of evil in the world. "You think you're ever going to catch anyone who matters?" she says to Alice. It is rhetorical and Alice knows better than to answer.

With *Furious*, I think we might be seeing the birth of a new subgenre of television drama; call it the Epstein thriller. Pre-him, the files and revelations about the depth and breadth of his network of suppliers, enablers and willing (rich, male) participants, we might have thought the plot of *Furious* preposterous, sitting uneasily with the series' grimly realistic tone and emotional palette. Now it is an organic, seamless, horrifying whole that asks how individuals survive such predators and how society survives such knowledge. And when we are going to become furious enough to do something to make a difference.



◀ Emmy Rossum and Quincy Tyler Bernstine

WHAT TO WATCH



The Vampire Lestat: Interview with the Vampire



True Blood meets Eurovision in this ludicrously camp vampire drama. This is the third series of *Interview with the Vampire* but it takes a new turn, now set in 2025 with the spotlight on blood-sucking glam rocker Lestat - played so erotically by Sam Reid (above) that he can pull off lines such as "MDMA and LSD: the Torvill and Dean of hallucinogens" and "I carry with me an immortal erection".

Hollie Richardson

The Great British Sewing Bee

8pm, BBC One

It's reduce, reuse and recycle week: the sewers must transform landfill scraps - everything from potato sacks to curtain rope tassels - into fast fashion and couture. But not before refashioning old T-shirts into three pairs of knickers. Emma: "I'm just going to bask in the glory that Patrick Grant liked my knickers."

Ali Catterall

Hotel Chocolat Unwrapped

8pm, Channel 4

This bumper advert for the chocolatier returns for a second series - and it kicks off with the first Hotel Chocolat instore bakery. Elsewhere, the Chocmobile - a van filled with chocolates - hits the summer festivals, while across the Atlantic, a store is set to open in Chicago. **HR**

The Undeclared War

9pm, Channel 4

The focus is on Siân Brooke's Dr Barbara Napier as Peter Kosminsky's portentous cyber thriller continues. There's some deep background as we

flashback to an ill-fated MI6 mission in 2014 and another in 2022. Barbara's charming but shifty ex, Nicky, is the thread connecting these operations. Surely that can't be a coincidence?

Phil Harrison

Shabaz Asks: Are Billionaires Bad?

9pm, BBC Three

The answer is straightforward, but former Blackburn teacher turned TikTok sensation Shabaz "King of the Povvos" Ali is a hoot as he goes on a journey to find out - with the aim of meeting a billionaire. Along the way, he'll encounter economists, Zack Polanski and an ex-Apprentice candidate. Plus, will his 2 million followers be able to help out? **HR**

Gomorrah: The Origins

9pm, Sky Atlantic

How did a disco-loving Naples gutter rat grow up to be ice-cold kingpin Don Pietro? This 1970s-set prequel to Sky's Italian gangster drama shades in the backstory. The opening double bill sees pimply teen Pietro glimpse a less glamorous side of Camorra life when hunky local underboss Angelo goes on the warpath. **Graeme Virtue**

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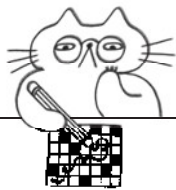
BBC One	BBC Two	ITV1	Channel 4	Channel 5	BBC Four
6.0 Breakfast (T) 9.30 Animal Park (T) (R) 10.15 Trace, Track, Get My Car Back (T) (R) 10.45 Expert Witness (T) (R) 11.15 Homes Under the Hammer (T) 12.15 Bargain Hunt (T) (R) 1.0 News (T) 1.35 Regional News and Weather (T) 1.45 News (T) 2.0 Money for Nothing (T) 2.45 Escape to the Country (T) (R) 3.45 The Bidding Room (T) (R) 4.30 The Travelling Auctioneers (T) (R) 5.15 Pointless (T) (R) 6.0 News (T) 6.30 Regional News and Weather (T) 7.0 The One Show (T) 7.30 EastEnders (T)	6.30 Bargain Hunt (T) (R) 7.15 Animal Park (T) (R) 8.0 Sign Zone: The Great British Sewing Bee (T) (R) 9.0 News (T) 1.0 Richard Osman's House of Games (T) (R) 1.30 The Finish Line (T) (R) 2.15 Lightning (T) (R) 2.45 The Hairy Bikers' Bakeation (T) (R) 3.45 The Farmers' Country Showdown (T) (R) 4.15 Earth from Space (T) (R) 5.15 Flog It! (T) (R) 6.0 Richard Osman's House of Games (T) (R) 6.30 Just One Thing (T) (R) 7.0 Rick Stein's Food Stories (T) (R)	6.0 Good Morning Britain (T) 10.0 This Morning (T) 1.0 News and Weather (T) 1.20 Local News and Weather (T) 1.30 ITV Racing: Glorious Goodwood (T) 4.30 Tipping Point: Best Ever Finals (T) (R) 5.0 The Chase (T) (R) 6.0 Local News and Weather (T) 6.30 News and Weather (T) 7.30 Inside the Langham: Britain's First Grand Hotel (T)	6.25 Cheers (T) (R) 7.45 Everybody Loves Raymond (T) (R) 9.10 Frasier (T) (R) 11.10 Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares USA (T) (R) 12.05 News (T) 12.10 Find It, Fix It, Flog It (T) (R) 1.10 The Great House Giveaway (T) (R) 2.10 Countdown (T) 3.0 A Place in the Sun (T) (R) 4.0 Narrow Escapes (T) (R) 5.0 Chateau DIY (T) (R) 6.0 American Pickers (T) (R) 7.0 News (T)	6.0 Milkshake! 9.15 Jeremy Vine (T) 11.30 Storm & Alexis (T) 12.45 News (T) 12.50 Matt Allwright (T) 2.20 FILM Mystery of the Dead Nanny (Brittany Underwood, 2022) (T) 4.0 Castle (T) (R) 4.55 Love Nature (T) (R) 5.0 News (T) 6.0 Malta: The Jewel of the Med (T) (R) 7.0 The Yorkshire Vet: At Home With the Greens (T) (R)	7.0 Great British Railway Journeys (T) (R) Michael Portillo travels to Dundee, Scotland's fourth largest city. 7.30 Walking With Monica Galetti (T) (R) A route in the North York Moors.
8.0 The Great British Sewing Bee (T) The contestants face reduce, reuse, recycle week, and have to make outfits with an eco-message. 9.0 Murder 24/7 (T) The case of five men convicted after the murder of 23-year-old Aurman Singh, a DPD driver who was ambushed and killed in Shrewsbury.	8.0 Amazing Hotels: Life Beyond the Lobby (T) (R) Rob Rinder and Monica Galetti work at a luxury hotel in Ibiza. 9.0 The Vampire Lestat: Interview With the Vampire (T) New series. Gothic horror, with Jacob Anderson. 9.45 Live at the Apollo (T) (R) With Jamali Maddix, Fern Brady and Sindhu Vee.	8.0 Emmerdale (T) Graham goes snooping around the depot. 8.30 Coronation Street (T) David and Shona confront Jodie. 9.0 Cold Case Forensics: The Death of God's Banker (T) New series. A look at the death of Italian banker Roberto Calvi, whose body was found hanging under Blackfriars Bridge in 1982.	8.0 Hotel Chocolat Unwrapped (T) New series. Behind the scenes at the chocolatier as the company moves into the bakery business. 9.0 The Undeclared War (T) Barbara crosses paths with ex-boyfriend Nicky Chan – first in 2014 in Hong Kong on a M16 mission, then in 2022 in London.	8.0 Inside Longleat (T) In the Secret Garden, the team manoeuvre a bronze sculpture by rock star Ronnie Wood into prime position. 9.0 The Crow Girl (T) As Jeanette and Sophia dig deeper into Victoria's past, their relationship grows closer, while Amar shares important information with Mike.	8.0 Keeping Up Appearances (T) (R) Hyacinth develops a passion for art. 8.30 One Foot in the Grave (T) (R) Victor has a sleepless night. 9.0 She-Wolves: England's Early Queens (T) (R) Helen Castor explores the lives of Isabella of France and Margaret of Anjou, two French-born queens of England.
10.0 News (T) 10.30 Regional News (T) Weather 10.40 FILM Blinded By the Light (Gurinder Chadha, 2019) (T) A teenager learns to live his life, understand his family and find his own voice through the music of Bruce Springsteen. Coming-of-age drama, starring Viveik Kalra. 12.30 Weather (T) 12.35 News (T)	10.30 Newsnight (T) Weather 11.05 FILM The New Boy (2023) (T) An Indigenous Australian orphan arrives at a remote monastery. Period drama, starring Cate Blanchett and Aswan Reid. 12.35 Sign Zone: Natalie Cassidy: Caring Together (T) (R) 1.05 Bergerac (T) (R) 1.55 Do You Know Your Place? (T) (R)	10.0 News (T) Weather 10.30 Local News (T) Weather 10.45 FILM Bad Boys (Michael Bay, 1995) (T) Two detectives are forced to swap identities as they hunt for heroin. Action thriller, starring Will Smith and Martin Lawrence. 1.0 Shop on TV 3.0 The Staircase (R) 4.05 Unwind With ITV (T) 5.10 Dickinson's Real Deal (R)	10.0 Gogglebox (T) (R) 11.05 First Dates (T) (R) 12.05 Naked Attraction (T) (R) 1.05 Kitchen Nightmares USA (T) (R) 1.55 The Piano (T) (R) 2.50 FILM American Refugee (Ali LeRoi, 2021) (T) Dystopian horror. 4.25 Come Dine With Me (T) (R) 5.15 Love It Or List It (T) (R) 5.45 Countdown (T) (R)	10.0 Commonwealth Games 2026 (T) Highlights from Glasgow. 11.05 Accused: Guilty Or Innocent? (T) (R) Double bill. 1.0 Cruise TV (T) (R) 2.0 Building the Impossible With Rob Bell (T) (R) 2.50 Malta: The Jewel of the Med (T) (R) 3.45 Friends (T) (R) 4.35 The Highland Vet (T) (R) 5.35 Milo (R) 5.45 Paddington (T) (R)	10.0 Castles: Britain's Fortified History (T) (R) 11.0 Corridors of Power: Should America Police the World? (T) (R) Double bill. 1.0 She-Wolves: England's Early Queens (T) (R) 2.0 Castles: Britain's Fortified History (T) (R) 3.0 Great British Railway Journeys (T) (R) 3.30 Walking With Monica Galetti (T) (R)

Other channels

BBC Three 7.0pm The Catch Up 7.05 Deadly 60 7.35 Deadly 60 8.0 Top Gear 9.0 Shabaz Asks: Are Billionaires Bad? 9.50 Good Bad Billionaire 10.35 Good Bad Billionaire 11.20 Good Bad Billionaire 12.10 The Tech Billionaire Takeover 1.10 OnlyFans: Inside the Machine 2.10 Dating Apps: The Inside Story 3.10 Shabaz Asks: Are Billionaires Bad? U&Dave 6.0am Teleshopping 7.30 Top Gear 8.20 Border Force: America's Gatekeepers 9.20 Border Force: America's Gatekeepers 10.20 Rick Stein's Long Weekends 11.25 Yukon Gold 12.20 Top Gear 1.20 Top Gear 2.20 Mortimer & Whitehouse: Gone Fishing 3.0 Robson Green: World's Most Amazing Walks 4.0 Rick Stein's Long Weekends 5.0 Rick Stein's Long Weekends 6.0 The Hairy Bikers: Mums Know Best 7.0 Mortimer & Whitehouse: Gone Fishing 7.40 Would I Lie to You? 8.20 Would I Lie to You? 9.0 Have I Got a Bit More News for You 10.0 QI XL 11.0 Taskmaster 12.0 Mock the Week 12.40 Would I	Lie to You? 1.20 Would I Lie to You? 2.0 QI XL 2.50 Taskmaster 4.0 Teleshopping E4 6.0am Hollyoaks 6.30 Hollyoaks 6.55 Rude(ish) Tube Shorts 7.0 Couples Come Dine With Me 8.0 Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares USA 9.0 Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares USA 10.0 America's Funniest Home Videos 11.0 Below Deck Down Under 12.0 The Simpsons 12.30 The Simpsons 1.0 The Simpsons 1.30 The Simpsons 2.0 Brooklyn Nine-Nine 2.30 Brooklyn Nine-Nine 3.0 Modern Family 3.30 Modern Family 4.0 Modern Family 4.30 Modern Family 5.0 The Simpsons 5.30 The Simpsons 6.0 The Simpsons 6.30 The Simpsons 7.0 Hollyoaks 7.30 The Simpsons 8.0 Below Deck Down Under 9.0 Gogglebox 10.0 First Dates 11.05 Naked Attraction 12.10 Gogglebox 1.10 Gogglebox 2.15 Below Deck Down Under 3.0 Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares USA 3.50 Abbott Elementary 4.15 The Simpsons 4.40 The Goldbergs 5.05 Brooklyn Nine-Nine 5.30 Brooklyn Nine-Nine	Film4 11.0am FILM The Undefeated (1969) 1.20 FILM Anne of the Thousand Days (1969) 4.10 FILM Twelve O'Clock High (1949) 6.50 FILM The Madness of King George (1994) 9.0 FILM American Star (2024) 11.10 FILM Sexy Beast (2000) 12.55 FILM Black Sea (2014) PBS America 6.0am Teleshopping 8.0 America the Bountiful 8.35 Treasures Decoded 9.35 Pirates: Behind the Legends 10.35 Maps of Power 11.50 Auschwitz: The Inside Man 1.0 America the Bountiful 1.35 Treasures Decoded 2.35 Pirates: Behind the Legends 3.35 Maps of Power 4.50 Auschwitz: The Inside Man 6.0 America the Bountiful 6.35 Treasures Decoded 7.35 Pirates: Behind the Legends 8.35 Maps of Power 9.50 Auschwitz: The Inside Man 11.0 Pirates: Behind the Legends 12.0 Maps of Power 1.15 America the Bountiful 2.0 Teleshopping Sky One 6.0am Mornings With Ridge and Frost 8.0 Stargate SG-1 9.0 NCIS: Los Angeles 10.0	Will & Grace 11.0 The Simpsons 12.0 Big Cat Country 1.0 Hawaii Five-0 3.0 S.W.A.T 5.0 The Simpsons 6.0 Animal Control 7.0 The Simpsons 8.0 Best Medicine 9.0 Never Mind the Buzzcocks 10.0 The 'Burbs 11.0 Animal Control 12.0 Grimm 1.0 The Force: Manchester 2.0 Road Wars 3.0 Hawaii Five-0 4.0 S.W.A.T 5.0 S.W.A.T Sky Arts 6.0am Classic FM's Rising Stars With Julian Lloyd Webber 2023 7.0 Classic FM's Rising Stars With Julian Lloyd Webber 2021 8.0 The Joy of Painting 9.0 Tales of the Unexpected 9.30 Tales of the Unexpected 10.0 Alfred Hitchcock Presents 10.30 Alfred Hitchcock Presents 11.0 Discovering: Claudia Cardinale 12.0 The Movies 1.0 Tales of the Unexpected 1.30 Tales of the Unexpected 2.0 The Alfred Hitchcock Hour 3.0 The Seventies 4.0 Discovering: Walter Matthau 5.0 Portrait Artist of the Year 2021 6.0 Tales of the Unexpected 6.30 Tales of the Unexpected 7.0 Alfred Hitchcock Presents 7.30 Alfred Hitchcock Presents 8.0	The World in a Painting: Caravaggio's Comb 9.15 Essential Classics 1.0 Beyond the Brush 9.45 Beyond the Brush 10.15 Wonderland: Gothic 11.15 Douglas Adams: The Man Who Imagined Our Future 12.45 Miyazaki: Spirit of Nature 2.20 FILM Cover Your Ears (2023) 4.10 The Art of the Garden 5.05 The Movies Sky Atlantic 6.0am Fish Town. 8.0 Billions 10.10 The White Lotus 12.25 Homicide: Life on the Street 2.15 Billions 4.25 The White Lotus 6.45 The Gilded Age 9.0 Gomorrah: The Origins 10.05 Gomorrah: The Origins 11.05 Prisoner 12.05 The White Lotus 1.20 The White Lotus 2.35 Billions 3.40 Urban Secrets 4.35 Sort Of 5.05 Urban Secrets  ▲ <i>Blinded By the Light</i>, BBC One
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Radio

Radio 3 6.30am Breakfast 9.30 Essential Classics 1.0 Classical Live. Highlights from the 2026 Proms, including Sakari Oramo conducting the BBC Symphony Orchestra in Mahler's Symphony No 6 in A minor. Plus, from the Aldeburgh festival, tenor Nicky Spence and pianist Julius Drake perform pieces by Purcell, R Strauss, Libby Larsen, Victoria Wood and Britten. 4.0 Composer of the Week: Alice Mary Smith (2/5) 5.0 In Tune 7.0 BBC Proms 2026. Sakari Oramo conducts the BBC Symphony Orchestra and cellist Guy Johnston in Turnage's Festen Suite, Britten's Cello Symphony and Sibelius's Symphony No 2 in D. 10.0 Night Tracks 11.30 'Round Midnight. Soweto Kinch hears from Ghanaian trumpeter Peter Somuah. 12.30 Through the Night Radio 4 6.0am Today 9.0 Invisible Hands. David Dimbleby tells the story of Harry Dexter, the man who made the US into a superpower. (1/6) 9.30 Inside Health (4/6) 10.0 Woman's Hour 11.0 Screenshot (R) 11.45 Book of the	Week: Confessions of a Performative Male. By Darren McGarvey. (2/5) 12.0 News 12.04 Call You and Yours 12.57 Weather 1.0 The World at One 1.45 Dead Rabbit. The powers behind the hare-coursing criminal underworld. (7/10) 2.0 The Archers (R) 2.15 Our Friends in the North. A final episode by Adam Usden that takes Peter Flannery's story to 2021. With Bryony Corrigan, David Leon and Lucy Aiston. (10/10) (R) 3.0 Lady on Trial With Lucy Worsley. The life of second world war conscientious objector Connie Bolam. (7/10) 3.30 Heart and Soul (R) 4.0 The Writing Life of Sylvia Plath. How Plath's personal relationships informed her work. (2/3) 4.30 What's Up Docs? Why people often follow bad advice. 5.0 PM 5.57 Weather 6.0 News 6.30 Meet David Sedaris (R) 7.0 The Archers 7.15 Front Row 8.0 Floor 15. Fergus Walsh follows experimental clinical trials at Guy's Hospital. 8.40 In Touch 9.0 The Documentary: The Dream Makers. Anand Jagatia explores the experimental field of dream engineering. 9.30 The Bottom Line	(R) 9.59 Weather 10.0 The World Tonight 10.45 Wild Dark Shore. By Charlotte McConaghy. (7/10) 11.0 Wild Inside (R) 11.30 A Good Read (R) 12.0 News and Weather 12.30 Book of the Week: Confessions of a Performative Male (R) 12.48 Shipping Forecast 1.0 As World Service 5.0 News Summary 5.04 Inside Science (R) 5.32 Weather 5.34 Shipping Forecast 5.43 Prayer for the Day 5.45 Farming Today Radio 4 Extra 6.0am Raffles (2/6) 6.30 Charles Paris: A Deadly Habit (1/4) 7.0 Yes Minister (3/8) 7.30 The Goon Show (14) 8.0 It's a Fair Cop (6/6) 8.30 Small Island (2/15) 9.0 Meet David Sedaris (4/6) 9.30 The Time of My Life (2/5) 9.45 Daily Service 10.0 A Good Read (6/9) 10.30 A Fork in the Road 11.0 Raffles (2/6) 11.30 Charles Paris: A Deadly Habit (1/4) 12.0 Yes Minister (3/8) 12.30 The Goon Show (14) 1.0 It's a Fair Cop (6/6) 1.30 Sounds Like London: 100 Years of Black Music in the Capital (2/5) 8.45 Small Island (2/15) 9.0 Meet David Sedaris (4/6) 9.30 The Time of My Life (2/5) 9.45 Daily Service 10.0 A Good Read (6/9) 10.30 A Fork in the Road 11.0 Raffles (2/6) 11.30 Charles Paris: A Deadly Habit (1/4) 12.0 Yes Minister (3/8) 12.30 The Goon Show (14) 1.0 It's a Fair Cop (6/6) 1.30 Sounds Like London: 100 Years of Black Music in the Capital (2/5) 1.45 Small Island (2/15)	2.0 Hoax! 2.30 The Brothers (3/4) 3.0 The No 1 Ladies' Detective Agency (1/4) 3.45 The Phoenix and the Carpet (2/5) 4.0 A Good Read (6/9) 4.30 A Fork in the Road 5.0 Raffles (2/6) 5.30 Charles Paris: A Deadly Habit (1/4) 6.0 Yes Minister (3/8) 6.30 The Goon Show (14) 7.0 It's a Fair Cop (6/6) 7.30 Sounds Like London (2/5) 7.45 Small Island (2/15) 8.0 Hoax! 8.30 The Brothers (3/4) 9.0 The No 1 Ladies' Detective Agency (1/4) 9.45 The Phoenix and the Carpet (2/5) 10.0 Meet David Sedaris (4/6) 10.30 And the Winner Is (4/6) 10.55 The Comedy Club Interview 11.0 All the World's a Globe (4/8) 11.15 Foley and McColl: The Interview (4/6) 11.30 Edge Falls (5/5) 12.0 A Good Read (6/9) 12.30 A Fork in the Road 1.0 Raffles (2/6) 1.30 Charles Paris: A Deadly Habit (1/4) 2.0 Yes Minister (3/8) 2.30 The Goon Show (14) 3.0 It's a Fair Cop (6/6) 3.30 Sounds Like London (2/5) 3.45 Small Island (2/15) 4.0 Hoax! 4.30 The Brothers (3/4) 5.0 The No 1 Ladies' Detective Agency (1/4) 5.45 The Phoenix and the Carpet (2/5)
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Yesterday's solutions

Wordsearch

S	E	V	E	N	O	A	K	S
Y	I	Y	W	R	E	V	O	D
R	M	A	H	T	A	H	C	R
U	A	W	I	U	K	I	A	O
B	R	D	T	I	H	M	S	F
R	G	E	S	Y	S	C	H	T
E	A	M	T	G	L	D	F	R
T	T	H	A	N	E	T	O	A
N	E	T	B	A	I	N	R	D
A	E	O	L	L	Y	D	D	U
C	I	Y	E	L	N	A	W	S

Solution no 17,542

J	A	R	G	O	N		H	E	L	I	U	M
O		I	N	M	X	D						E
S	U	P	R	E	M	E	P	R	I	A	M	
T	E	R	G	E	O							O
L	A	R	G	O		A	L	L	S	T	A	R
E						U	L					Y
	A	R	I	S	T	O	C	R	A	C	Y	
T	E		M		I							O
R	E	P	L	I	C	A		P	E	T	E	R
A		R	I	N		O		R				A
C	H	I	E	F		I	N	S	T	A	N	T
E	N	E		A	T	C	O					
R	E	T	U	R	N		V	E	C	T	O	R

Sudoku no 7,396

6	9	1	8	7	4	3	5	2
5	2	3	9	6	1	4	7	8
8	4	7	5	3	2	1	6	9
2	8	6	4	5	9	7	1	3
7	1	5	3	8	6	2	9	4
9	3	4	2	1	7	5	8	6
3	5	2	1	9	8	6	4	7
4	7	9	6	2	5	8	3	1
1	6	8	7	4	3	9	2	5

Word wheel
RETRIEVER

Suguru

1	3	1	3	2	4
5	2	5	4	5	1
4	1	3	1	3	2
2	5	4	2	4	1
1	3	1	3	5	3
2	4	2	4	2	1

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Quick crossword no 17,543

Across

- 1 Ability to endure - partying woes (anag) (7,5)
- 9 Lowest point (5)
- 10 Fake - credit card (7)
- 11 Count (on) (4)
- 12 Dangerous building (8)
- 14 What one aims for (6)
- 15 Vicar's standpoint? (6)
- 18 Direct (8)
- 20 Register - drumbeats (4)
- 22 Give apparent legitimacy to (dirty money) (7)
- 23 Evident (5)
- 24 Feeling(s) of misery (12)

Down

- 2 Little fish (7)
- 3 Long story (4)
- 4 Table cloth? (6)
- 5 Gradually stop using (something) (5,3)
- 6 Bed, buffalo or bill? (5)
- 7 To sum up (12)
- 8 Generally accepted, but not official, rule (9,3)
- 13 Occasional (8)
- 16 Accepted method (7)
- 17 Intense (6)
- 19 One may be pregnant (5)
- 21 Blue - feathers (4)

	1	2		3		4		5		6		7
8												
9						10						
11						12						
14								15		16		
18										20		
22												
24												



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Sudoku no 7,397

Medium. Fill the grid so that each row, column and 3x3 box contains the numbers 1-9. Printable version at theguardian.com/sudoku

3			5			4
7	1					5
		9	6		7	
9					5	4
	5	6		4	8	
4	2				9	
1			7	2		
9					4	2
2			3			1

Suguru

Fill the grid so that each square in an outlined block contains a digit. A block of two squares contains the digits 1 and 2, a block of three squares contains the digits 1, 2 and 3, and so on. No same digit appears in neighbouring squares, not even diagonally.

			2	3	
		3			2
				3	5
5			4		1

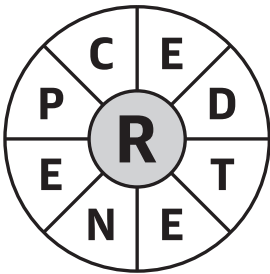
Wordsearch

Can you find 15 words associated with Hamlet in the grid? Words can run forwards, backwards, vertically or diagonally, but always in a straight, unbroken line.

H	O	R	A	T	I	O	G	P
K	C	I	R	O	Y	E	S	O
K	P	C	M	V	R	R	U	I
R	L	L	Y	T	G	E	I	S
A	A	A	R	O	H	V	N	O
M	Y	U	E	S	O	E	O	N
N	D	D	N	R	S	N	L	L
E	T	I	N	I	T	G	O	L
D	A	U	U	C	T	E	P	U
E	A	S	N	E	M	T	S	K
E	A	I	L	E	H	P	O	S

Word wheel

Find as many words as possible using the letters in the wheel. Each must use the central letter and at least three others. Letters may be used only once. You may not use plurals, foreign words or proper nouns. There is at least one nine-letter word to be found. Target: 23. Good: 29. Very good: 35. Excellent: 41



Trivia corner

Beatrix Potter was born on this day in 1866. What kind of animal is her creation Mrs Tiggy-Winkle?

- a) Duck
 - b) Hedgehog
 - c) Rabbit
 - d) Squirrel
- Answer top right

